

Number Seven in our series **INTERVIEWS WITHOUT**



Mr & Mrs Raymaekers

AN INTERVIEW WITHOUT MARCEL RAYMAEKERS

I called unannounced at Queen of the South in February. Needless to say, Raymaekers, uncrowned King of Europe's architectural salvage dealers, was off in Brussels looking at a marble staircase that was about to be trashed, although it didn't sound too hopeful. I have been there twice before, but never met or spoken to him. So I have compiled this interview in the great man's absence, from newspaper cuttings, with a few anecdotes from some of the bemused UK trade, amongst whom Raymaekers has had an enduring effect.

The business is typical of many French and Belgian salvage businesses that have been established for a long time: it is space extensive, has a low stock to turnover ratio, and employs few people. The area covered must be over three acres, and this has expanded in 1992 with a new site adjacent to the main road which will become a display of fountains and other stock.

Raymaekers (he prefers to be called by his surname alone) started Queen of the South around twenty years ago after a childhood watching the old houses of Brussels being smashed to pieces. "My appreciation of the simple and beautiful in objects started early on. When I was a kid things like old sweet wrappers and cigarette boxes caught my imagination. Seeing old Brussels being destroyed was formative and on finishing my life as a student I

began an architectural practice using old items as well as the new."

In between school and his architecture qualification came two years at art school.

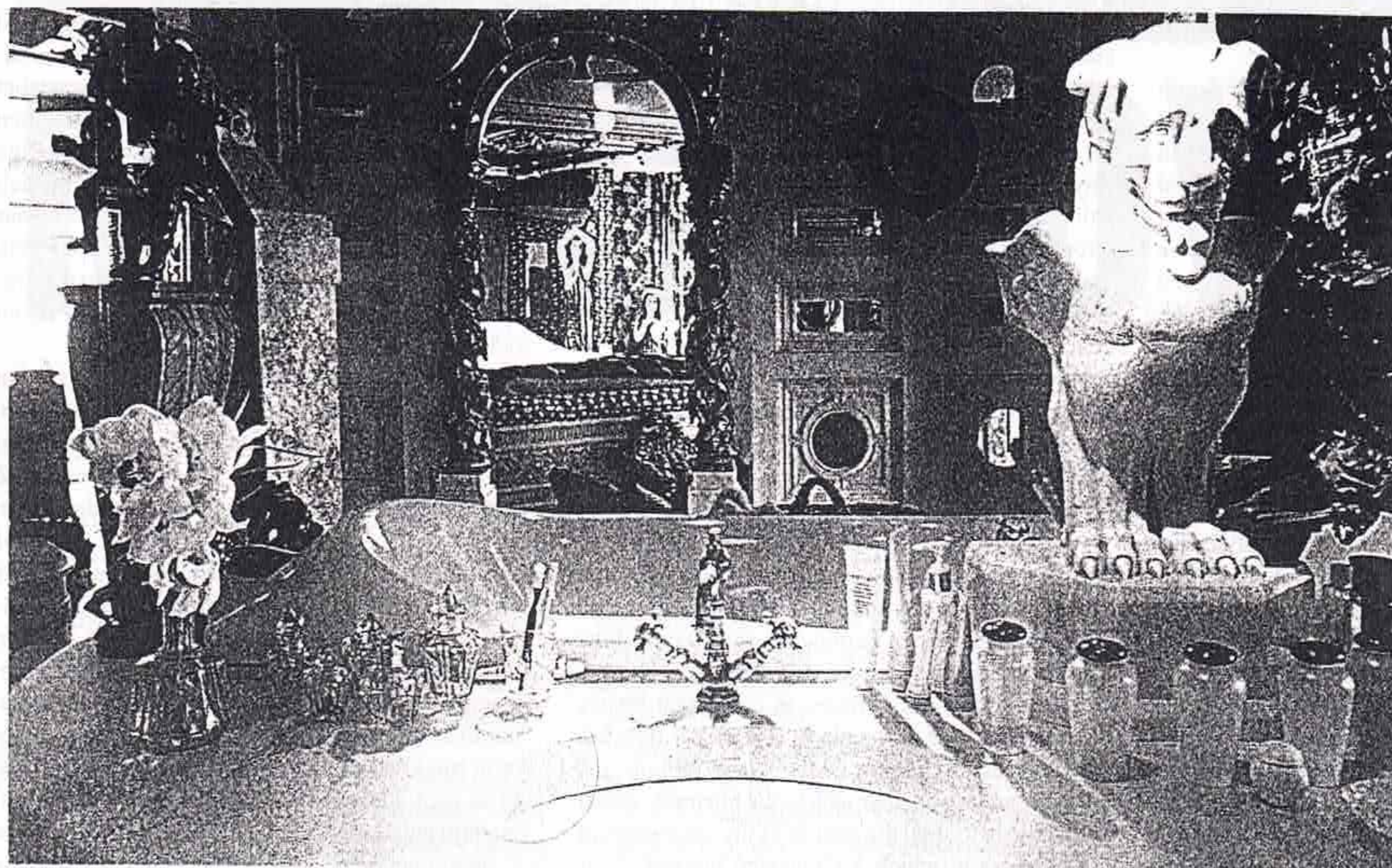
The name Queen of the South comes from the giant paddle wheel housing from an old paddle steamer that was broken up in Antwerp and which now adorns the premises at Genk where Raymaekers has constructed an edifice worthy of the Addams Family. He has had scuffles with officialdom and it is suspected that the planners would not allow such a cavalier approach to homebuilding these days. When he first moved there in 1972 it was a farm, no buildings, just cows. Luckily he established the business in a more relaxed

era.

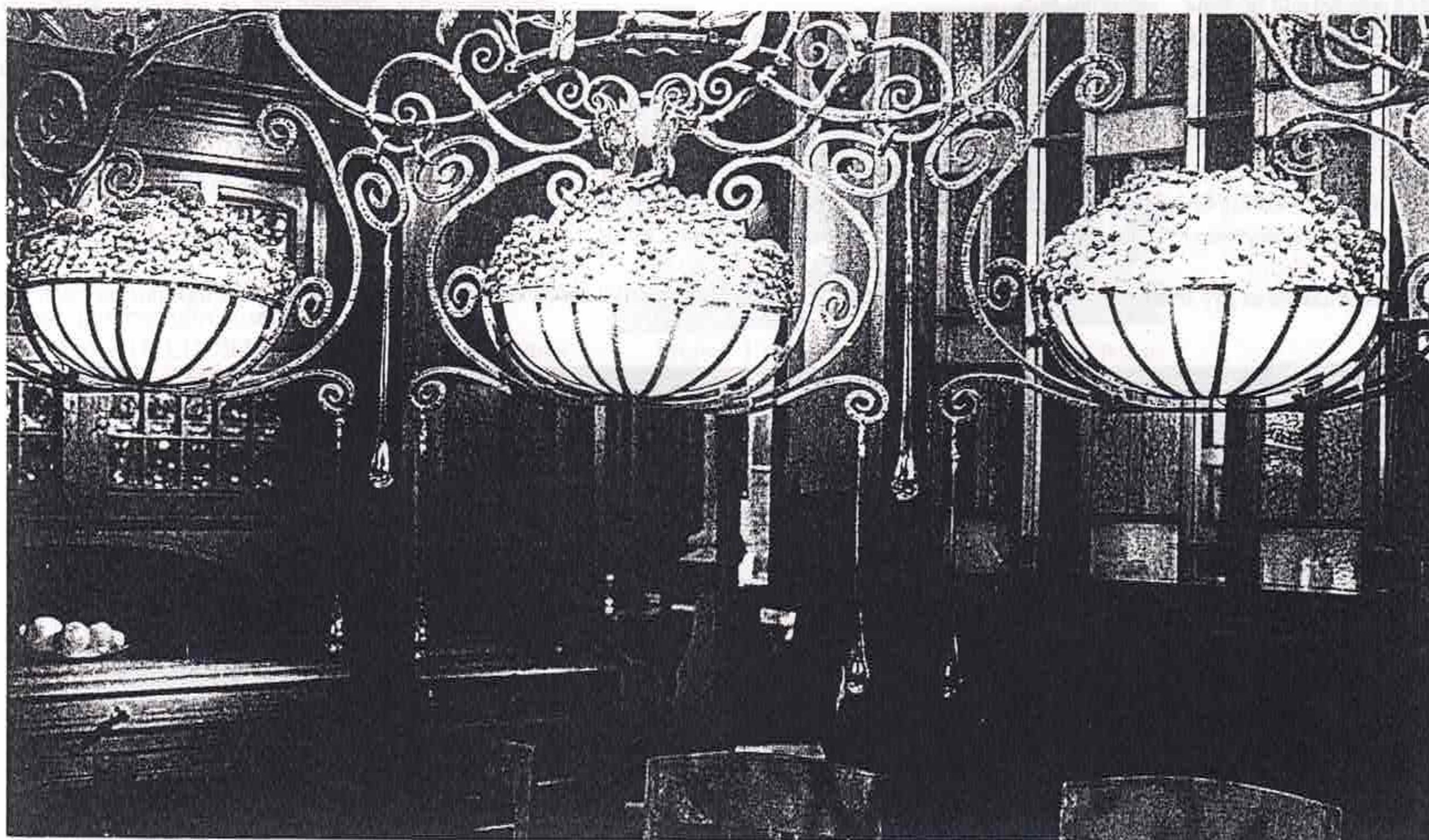
By 1980 he was a household name in Belgium and carving out a reputation throughout the world for his style. In that year the *Arizona Republic* carried a story entitled 'Architect recycles castle treasure' in which a slightly younger Raymaekers gives a couple of convincing throwaway couplets including "On

Right: QoS HQ showing the namesake paddlewheel on the front facade and the architectural melange that Raymaekers has created over the past fifteen years. In the foreground is the proposed fountain and garden ornament display area.





Left: Bathroom by Raymaekers, 1991.



Left : Dining Room by Raymaekers. Date unknown.

average we tear down five castles a year" and "for me the historical value of the places we tear down is the least important aspect."

And more seriously (for 'people' insert 'architects'). "People look at things like heavily ornamented 19thC stone window or door surrounds or marble columns and wonder what purpose they *have* served. They don't stop to think what purpose they *can* serve. By recycling these items and finding a new purpose for them, I re-evaluate them. Most places we demolish are overgrown with weeds because maintenance costs are too high. Neglect set in years ago."

The end of this interview has the prescient comment "these are the fat years that will have to carry me through the lean years that are coming" and a less prescient "that means that after five years we'll have

to start looking to England - there are a fair number of places left there."

Last year he was interviewed by *Interiorgids*, an up-market Belgian interiors magazine in an article called 'Flirten met fantasie' which sums it up better than I can translate. Here, in his native tongue, he is more lucid. The translation is mine and my Dutch is not even good enough to be classified monosyllabic - so we have also included part of the text in Flemish at the end. The article includes the following passage:

He has been accused by colleagues in Belgium of being overbearing, bombastic and 'kitscherig'.

"I must always move on. I am sometimes accused of titillating, teasing, and being butterfly-like while others are full of praise. One thing never changes however, and that is that Queen of the South

never leaves anyone cold. Just as Georges Braque had the skill to make collages out of anything, ties, matchboxes, articles out of your coat pocket, I also adopt a catholic approach to my work, creating from originals an authentic and frequently extraordinary and remarkable aesthetic. Although this stems from my youth, I have not changed much, I do not bend to convention. I see a beautiful material and think to myself: one day I'll need that or someone else will. And it will be married, the unique to the plain. Buying must be driven by spontaneity, authenticity and sentimentality. The whole is an antidote for a rationalist and impersonal society."

One has the impression that Queen of the South is used by Raymaekers as a reservoir of style for his renovation projects and that sales are secondary to (continued on next page)

his design work. How much is veneer and bravado, and how much is inspired and serious remains unanswered. Pending a real interview one day.

Two UK dealers that know Queen of the South create a slightly skewed view of Raymaekers that would compare him more with Rene Magritte than Georges Braque. (Clearly a case of deep seated professional jealousy.) When a newspaper journalist went to interview him, Magritte himself opened the front door. The journalist walked past Magritte and got an enormous and painful kick up the backside. He wheeled round and Magritte, who was standing there quite calmly as if nothing had happened, said politely "Can I take your coat?"

His yard is the envy of the English dealers who know of it. The scope of the stock is huge, ranging from top end animalier bronze miniatures in the showrooms through to an acre or more of serried ranks of old marble cladding and bits of stone. The quality of the stock has declined over the years, but isn't that true everywhere? He appears to have a vaguely ambivalent attitude to the UK trade - not dismissive exactly but tolerant. He ranks high in my opinion, not least because of the energy that he has expended and his own sincerity. He is designer and dealer in a way that, apart from maybe the young Water Monopoly, is not emulated in England.

Genk is situated at the far eastern side of Belgium and is minutes away from Maastricht and the Dutch and German borders. Around 80% of QoS sales are export, with Germany being the main contender. Like Andy Thornton, the selling of architectural antiques, while important, appears secondary to their value in his designing business.

Raymaekers spends much of his time looking for gear and designing for clients. We show two photos

from *Interieurgids*, one showing a 19thC wrought iron concoction with three bowls of fruit lamps attached and then glass drops attached to them. The whole thing forms an over-the-top over-the-table light that seems to harmonise well within the scheme for the dining room. The other photo shows one of Raymaeker's bathrooms. He never uses reclaimed bathroom gear - it's too much trouble when it goes wrong. But he does use a whole panoply of materials and styles to create his effect.

The Belgians are extremely floor and finish conscious, and seem to have the trade skills to achieve authentic aged effects. The floor finish movement there could be compared with say the Jocasta Innes sponging thing in England - if only the Home Interest mags here could get to grips with floor finishes the way that the Belgian mags do.

So where is Raymaeker's going? He is no longer a young man. His is an antidote to an impersonal society, but who said that society is rationalist? Fact remains stranger than fiction. His yard is one of the most impressive in Europe, if not the most impressive. He must think at times, as retirement looms, what will become of the place. It seems as if he has two choices - a gentle decline or a sell-up and takeover and a new approach to the business. Either way is likely to spell the demise of the uniqueness of the business in which Raymaekers himself is the pivotal hub.

Next Week: A look round Queen of the South.

Architect Raymaekers levert al sinds de jaren zestig een verbeten strijd tegen wat hij gebrek aan artistiekeit noemt. "Nu weet iedereen wat het verleden waard is, maar twintig, dertig jaar geleden lag dat helemaal anders. Toen vond de architectuuro-

pleiding het verleden kitscherig en decadent. Alles waaraan een krulletje of een tierelantijntje zat, werd stevast verwezen naar de vlooiemarkt of de brandstepel. Maar meteen gooide ze het kind met het badwater weg. Daarmee heb ik me nooit kunnen verzoenen. Wél heb ik zoals de andere toenmalige architecten geëxperimenteerd met vormgeving, heb ik b.v. lokalen zonder wanden en deuren in elkaar laten doorlopen. Voor de rest ben ik mezelf gebleven. Nu al die tijd later, staan de architecten en decorateurs allemaal ongeveer op dezelfde lijn als ik, en voel ik mij helemaal geen inicum meer."

Die kritiek van sommige klanten of collega's is dan ook niet mals; het is overladen, bombastisch, kitscherig. "Ik moet dan altijd verbeteren met de zin: u bedoelt dat het voor u té speels, té plezant, té vlinderachtig is" aldus Raymaekers. "Anderen zijn dan weer vol lof. Maar één ding staat vast: Queen of the South laat niemand koud. Zoals Braque vroeger een collage maakte met voorwerpen van alle mogelijke herkomst, knopen, luciferdoosjes, zelf stukken van zijn jas, zo confronteer ook ik zaken die elkaar in wezen niet dulden op een zodanige manier dat daaruit een originele, authentieke en vaak buitengewoon merkwaardige esthetiek geboren wordt. Die liefde voor simpele, maar mooie dingen dateert al van mijn jeugd. Een pas weggegooid pralinepapiertje of sigarettendoosje kon ik niet laten liggen. Die neiging heb ik vandaag nog. Ik zie een mooi materiaal, en daarvan denk ik: daarmee doe ik nog eens iets, of dat zullen mensen ooit nog eens nodig hebben. Dat is trouwens de enige maatstaf als ik iets aankoop: het moet spontaan zijn, authentiek, gevoelsmatig. Een tegengif voor een rationalistische en onpersoonlijke samenleving."

Interieurgids, 4e Jaargang 1992, No5

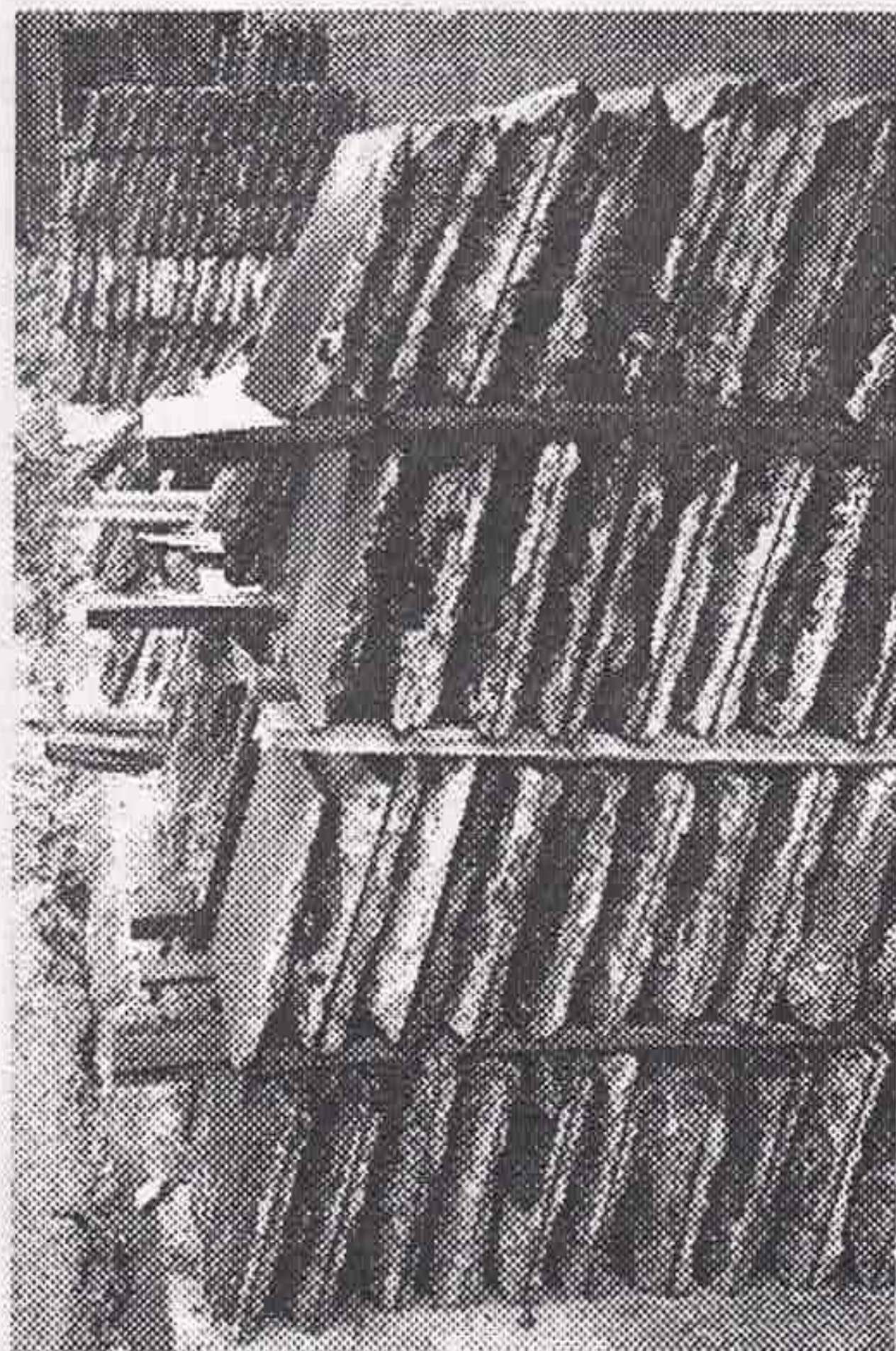
Below: This fearsome Bitch is located at eye level immediately inside the front door - its an effective shock and quite a good piece although not for sale.



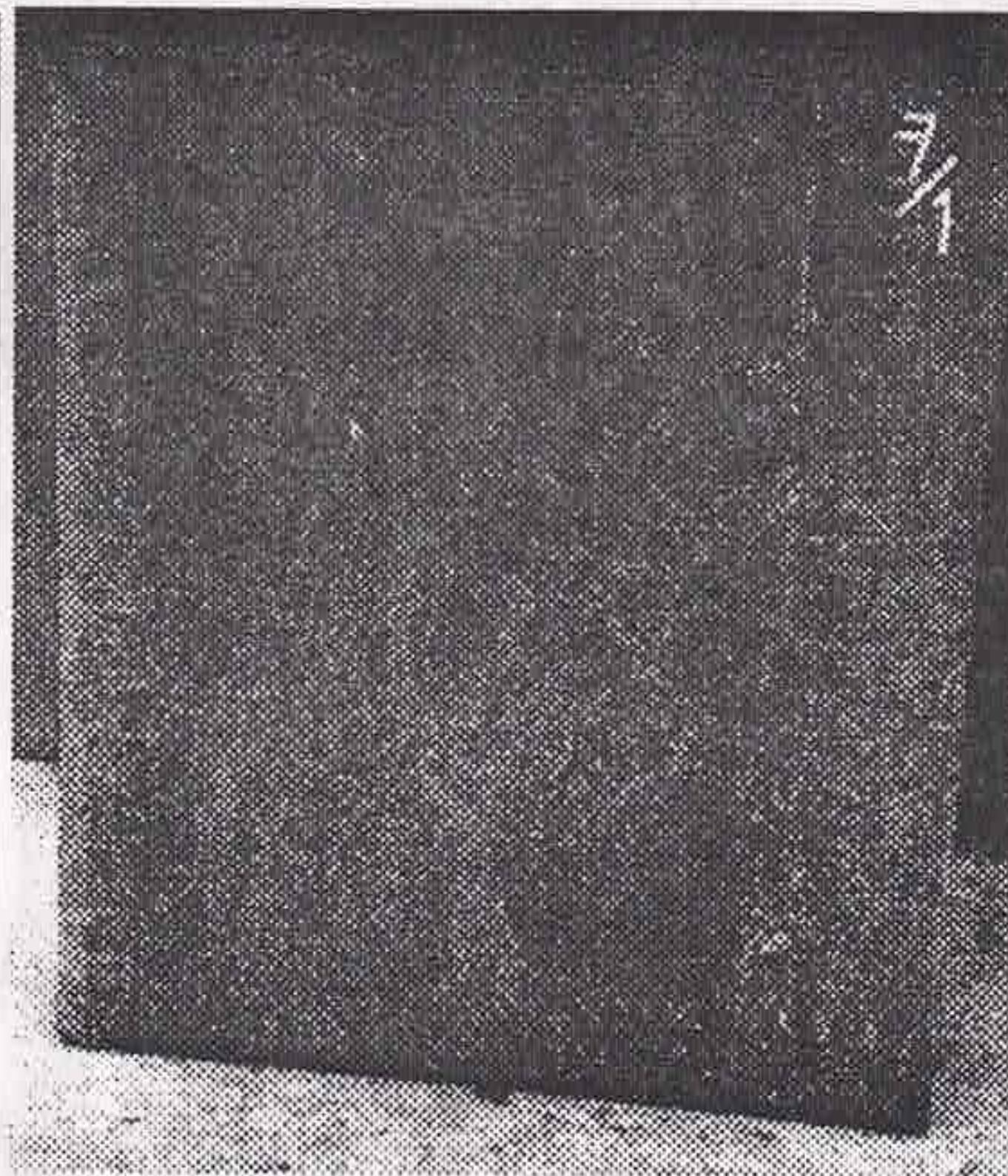
Following Belgium Part One in last weeks SalvoNews we return to a location close to Maastricht

QUEEN OF THE SOUTH in Genk

Having glossed over the *raison d'être* of Mr Raymaekers in part one we now have a quick shuftly at some of his huge stock. For simplicity we have taken 50 Belgian Francs to the Pound. The current tourist rates are BFr 47.5 = £1 or money market BFr49 = £1. We have also used the term Black Marble for Belgian Black Marble and Blue Marble instead of Belgian Blue polishable Limestone and Fossil Marble for Belgian Blue Fossil polishable Limestone because we all know that you can't have fossils in true marble. Also see last week's primer on Belgium's geology. The Fossil Marble can best be described as a blue black equivalent to Purbeck Marble. Most of the items here originate from Belgium although some have come from France or even Germany. Our thanks go to Mrs Raymaekers for sparing time to sort out prices but the descriptions are ours and the accuracy is not guranteed. If you are interested in buying any of the stock Queen of the South are multi-lingual and well used to dealing in English but faxing maybe the best approach initially. Queen of the South, Hasseltweg 377, 3600 Genk, Belgium. Telephone 089 35 62 47 Fax 089 35 63 33 (from UK tel 010 32 89 35 62 47 fax 010 32 89 35 63 33) Open six days inc Sunday. Closed Tues



Hand wrought old Belgian Black Marble floor tiles around nine inches square. BFr3,800 £76 sqm.



Above: Unusual old hand wrought Fossil Marble flags with tooled margins and underside tooled to flat pyramid shape as exposed ceiling. Will form passageway around 6m long by 80cm wide. Bfr 50,000 £1,000 the lot or £140 the piece.

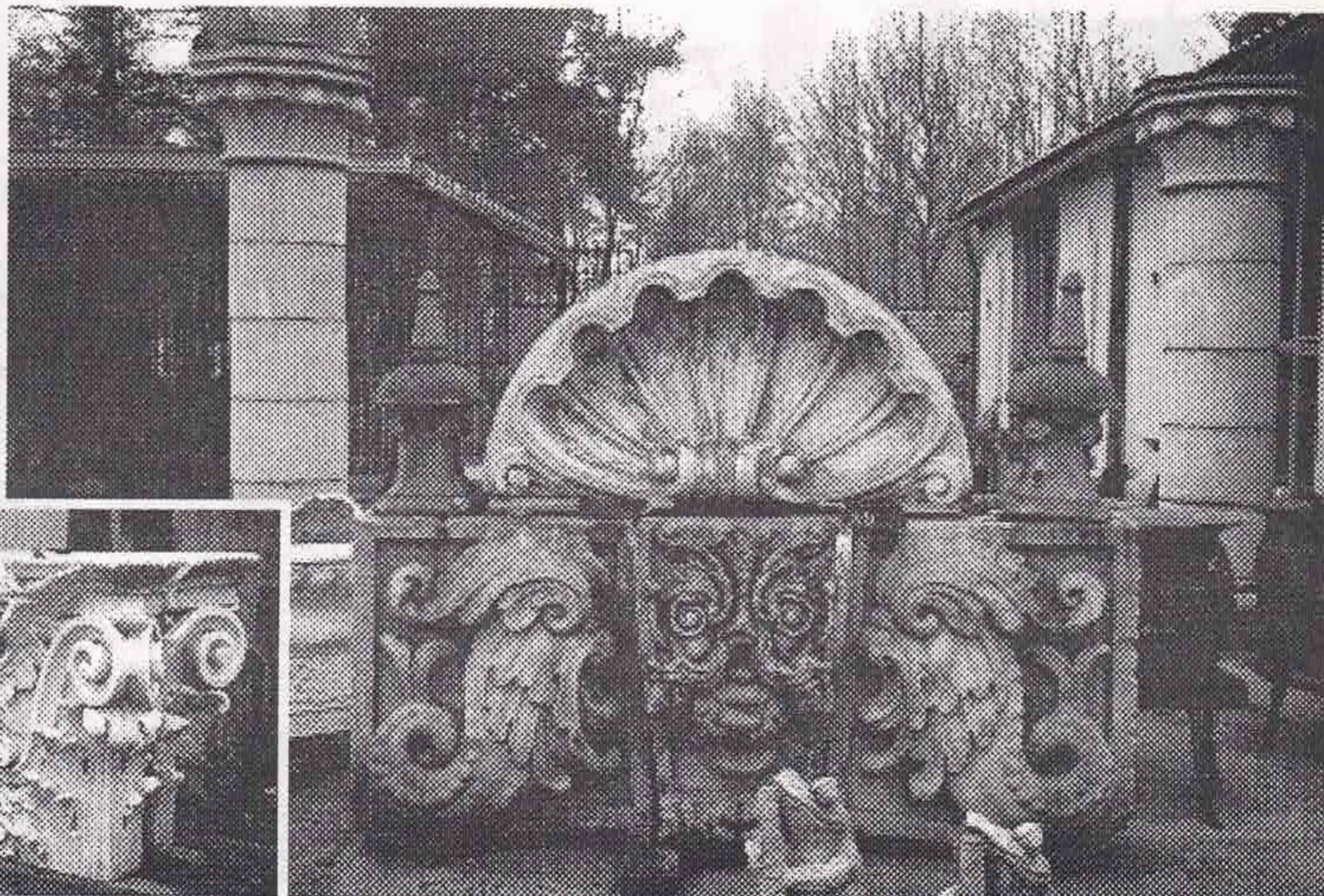


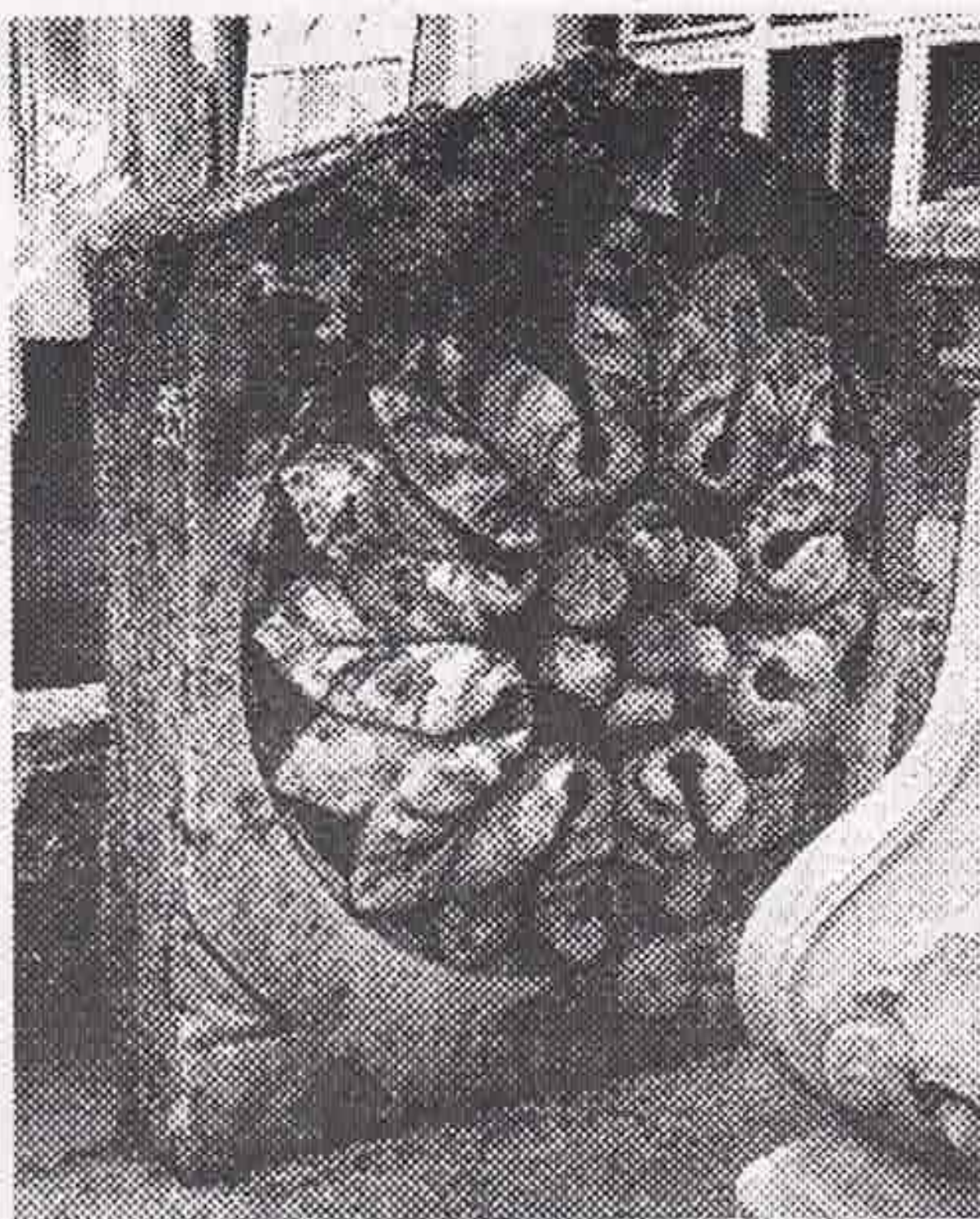
Above: Two varieties of limestone cornice in 300mm lengths Bfr2,500 £50 each part of a huge quantity of dressings in stock at any one time.

Right: Jumbo three piece carved limestone highly mannerist head. 2.3m wide by 90cm high. Bfr 175,000 £3,500

Pair of carved sandstone shells (one shown) Bfr 145,000 £2,900 each

Below: Fine white Sicilian marble Ionic pilaster caps with putti heads. Six pairs available Bfr 520,000 £10,400 pair

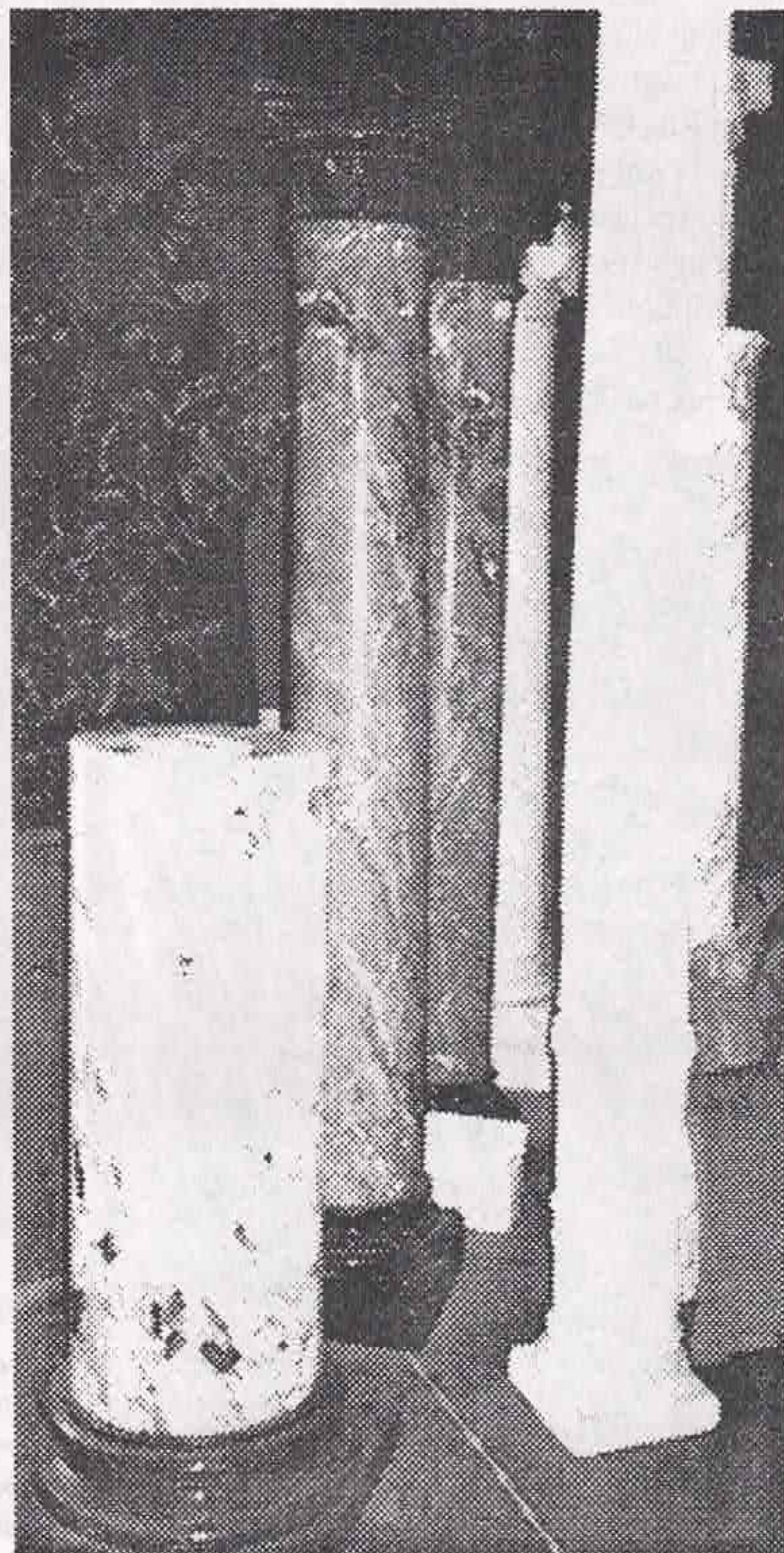
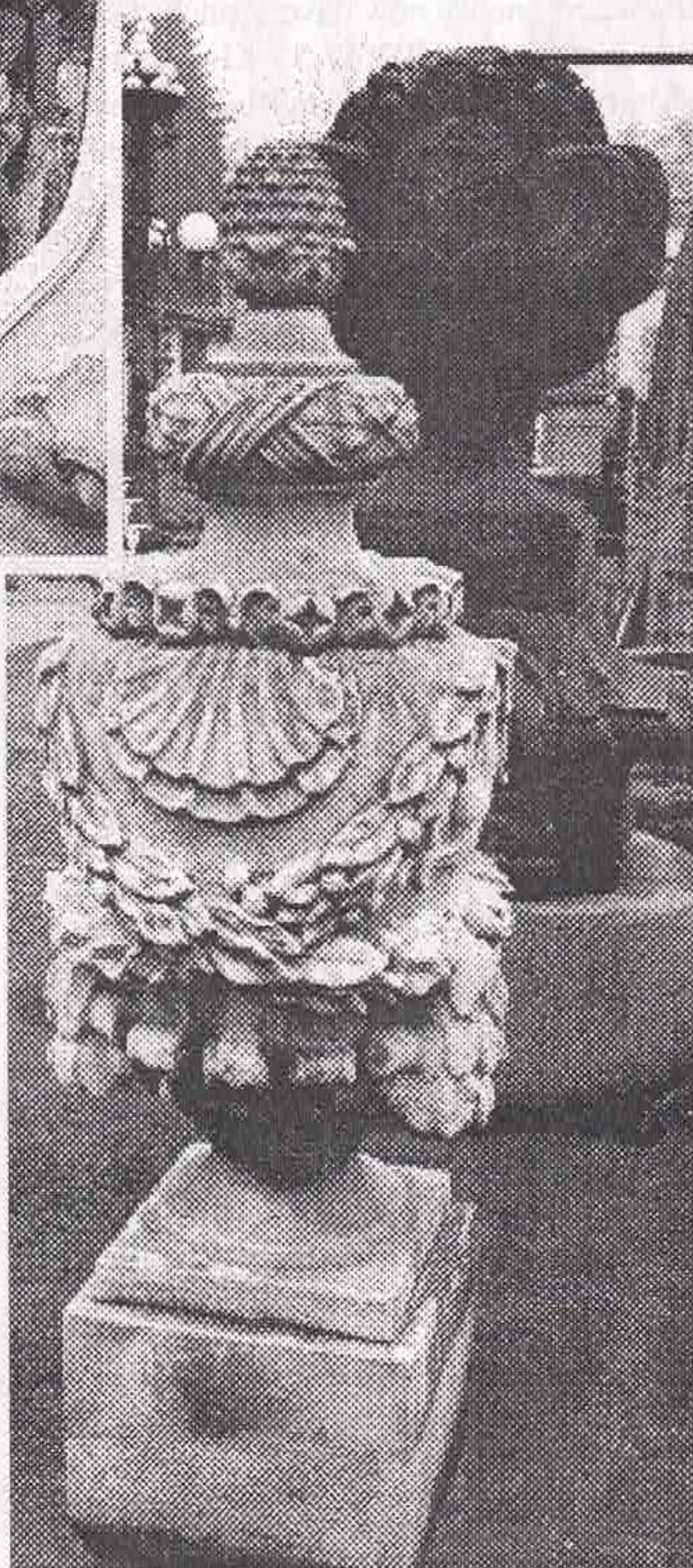




Left: Carved limestone flower head, maybe a sunflower or chrysanth (?) anyway it's part of the spandrel panel below a pediment. 1m high. Bfr 95,000 £1,900.

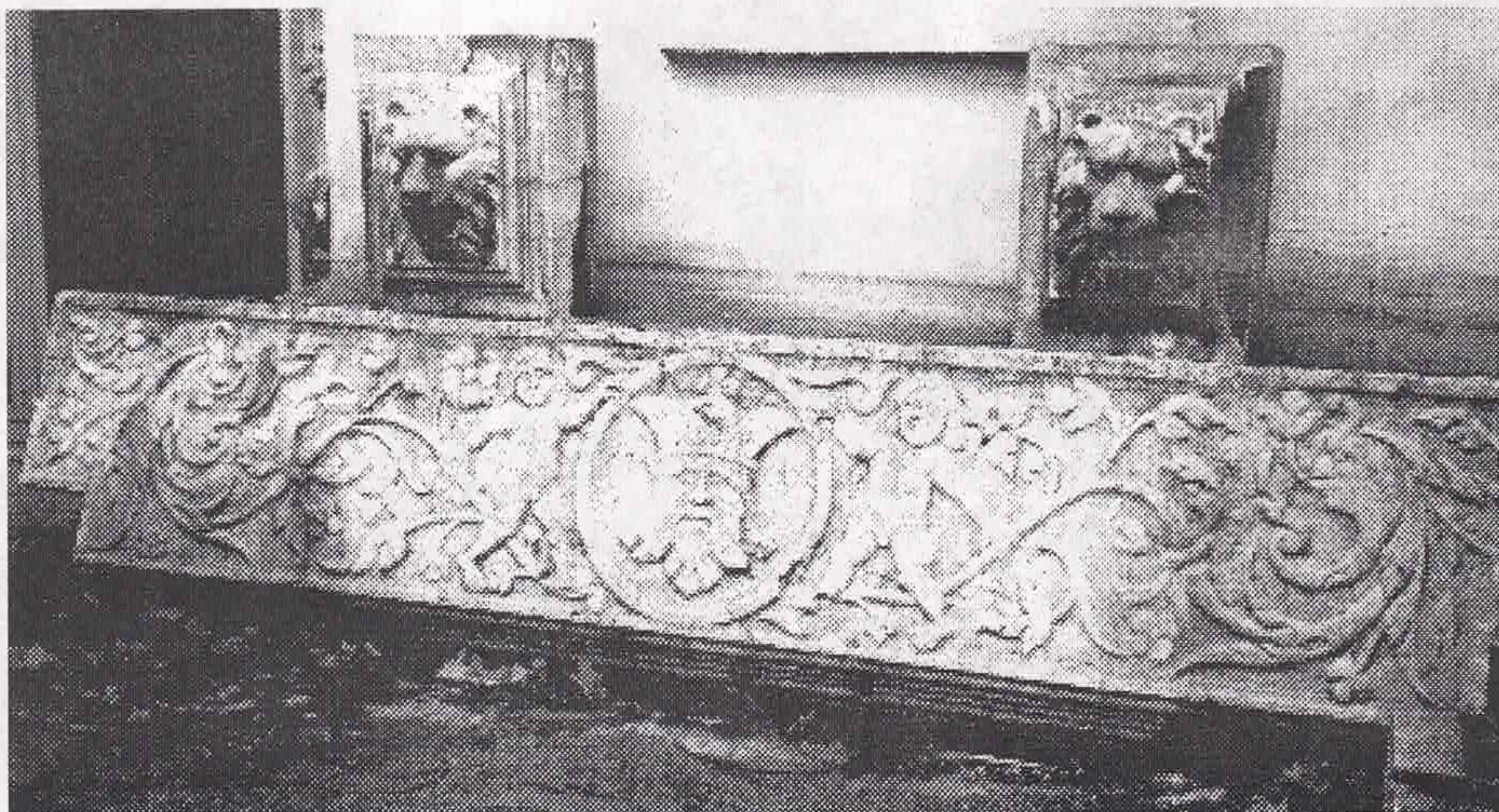
Below: Pair of solid marble columns. Black Marble caps and base with white veining. 2.4m high Bfr 395,000 £7,900 pair. Various other columns including a pair of white Sicilian with Ionic Caps, plus pedestals etc.

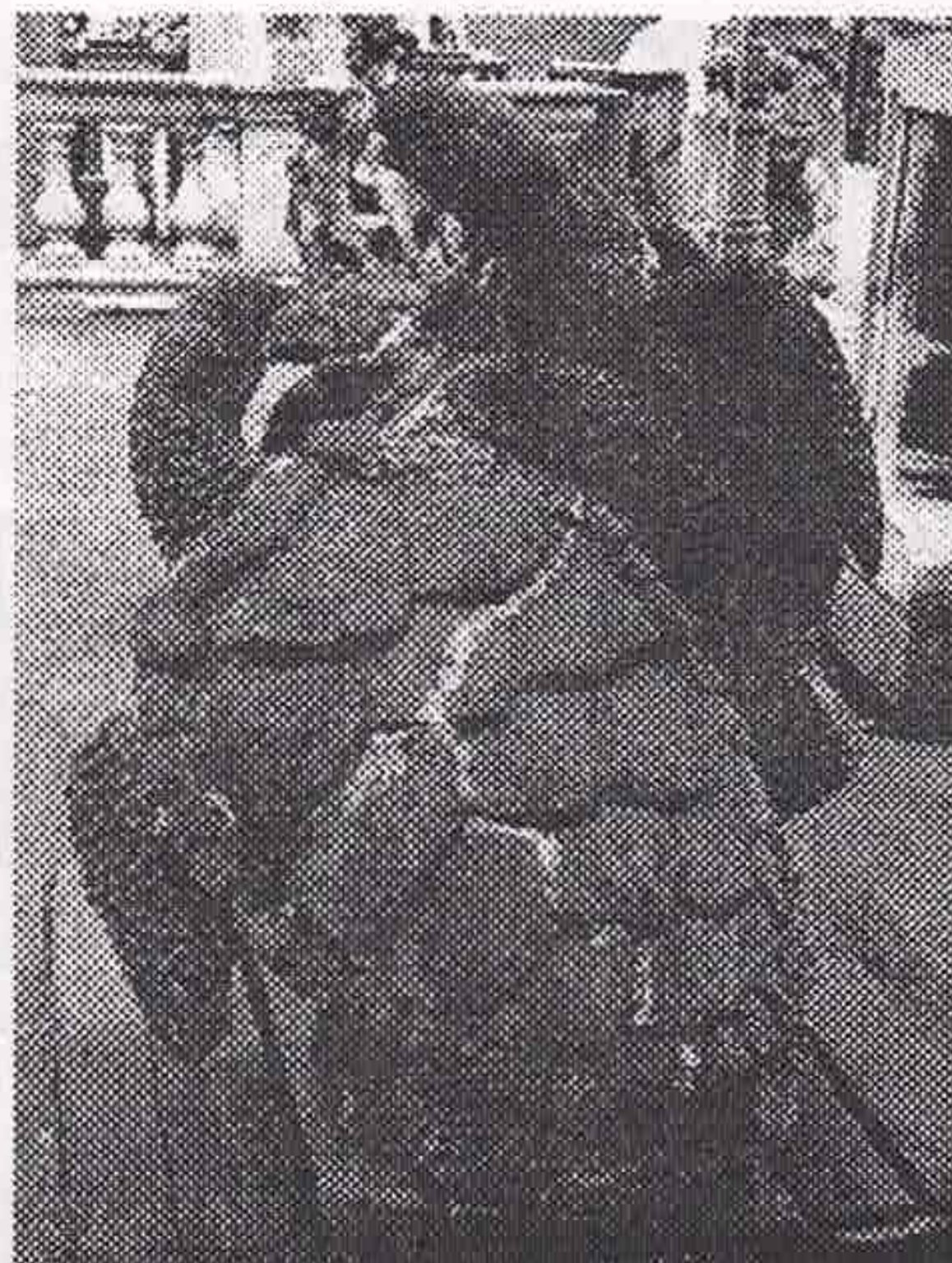
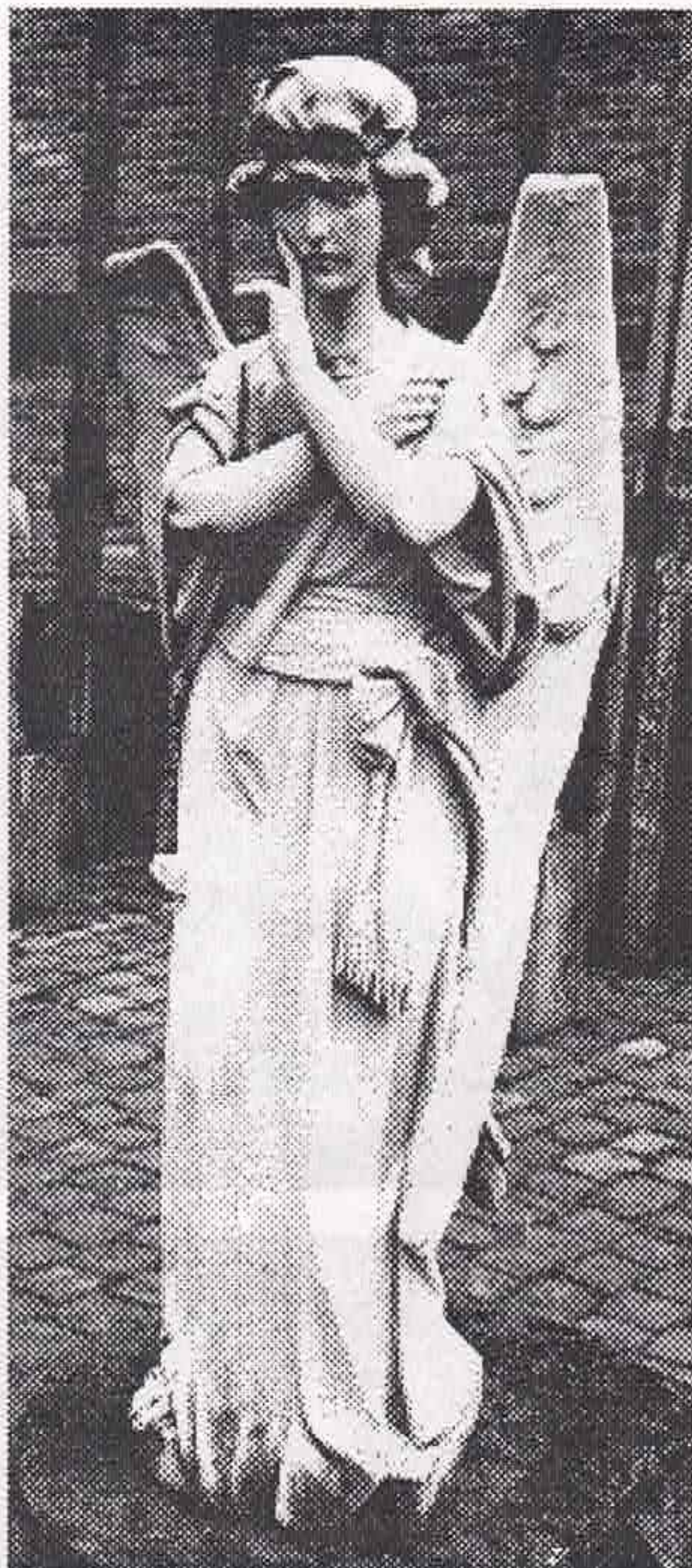
Right: Two pairs of Urn Finials (only one of each shown). Foreground smaller limestone 2m high. Bfr 465,000 £9,300. Larger Belgian Blue limestone to rear 2.2m high. Price not known.



Below: Old carved lintel. French Renaissance style - looks like marble, maybe limestone. The central tondo looks awfully familiar, but we can't place it. Light relief. 2.2m wide. Bfr 165,000 £3,300

Above are two limestone Lion masks. Bfr 65,000 £1,300





Above: Dancing Turtles or maybe fighting. In terracotta. Believed to be 18thC. 1.1m high. Bfr 240,000 £4,800



Right: White marble Napoleon. Inscrutable, imperious and defeated at Waterloo, twenty miles south of Brussels, by a combine of European forces. Life size. Bfr 950,000 £19,000

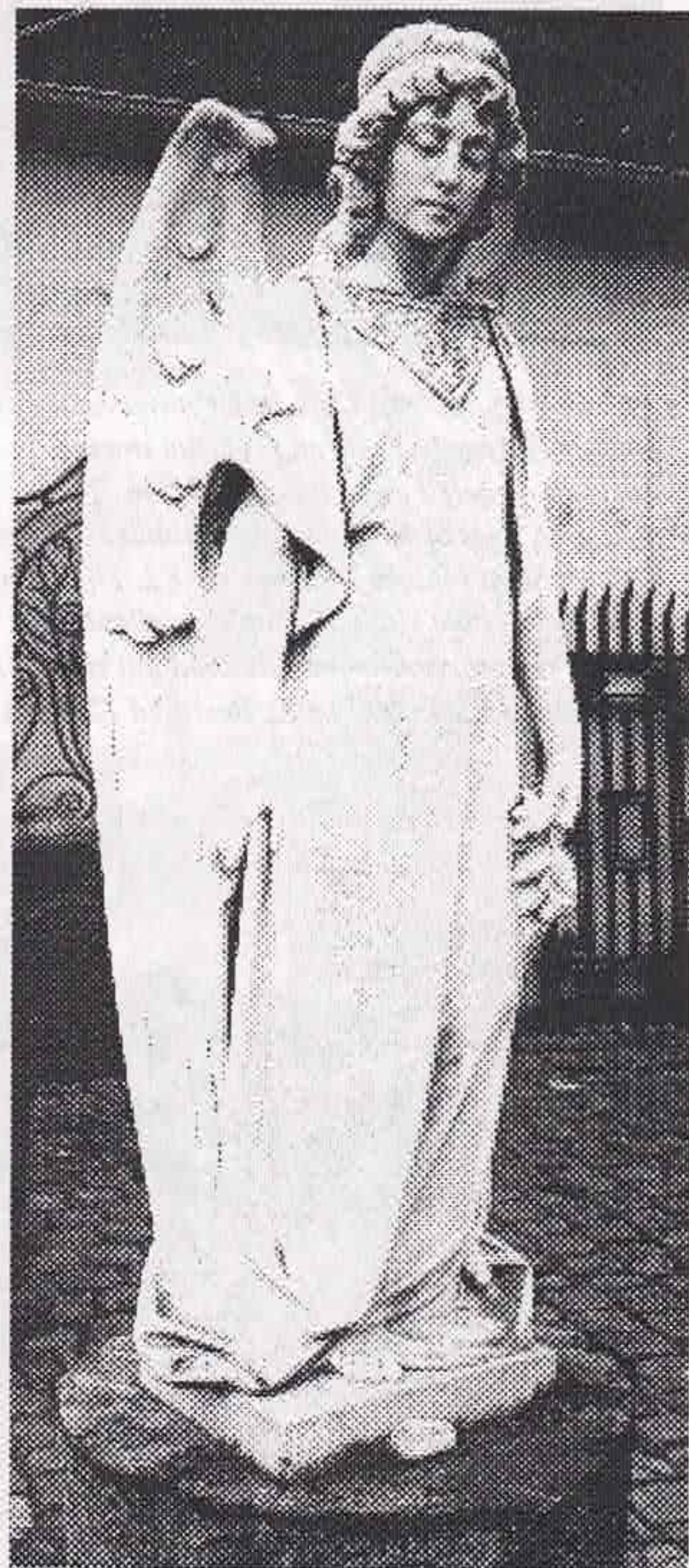
Above: c1880 marble Angel 1.8m high Bfr 175,000 £3,500

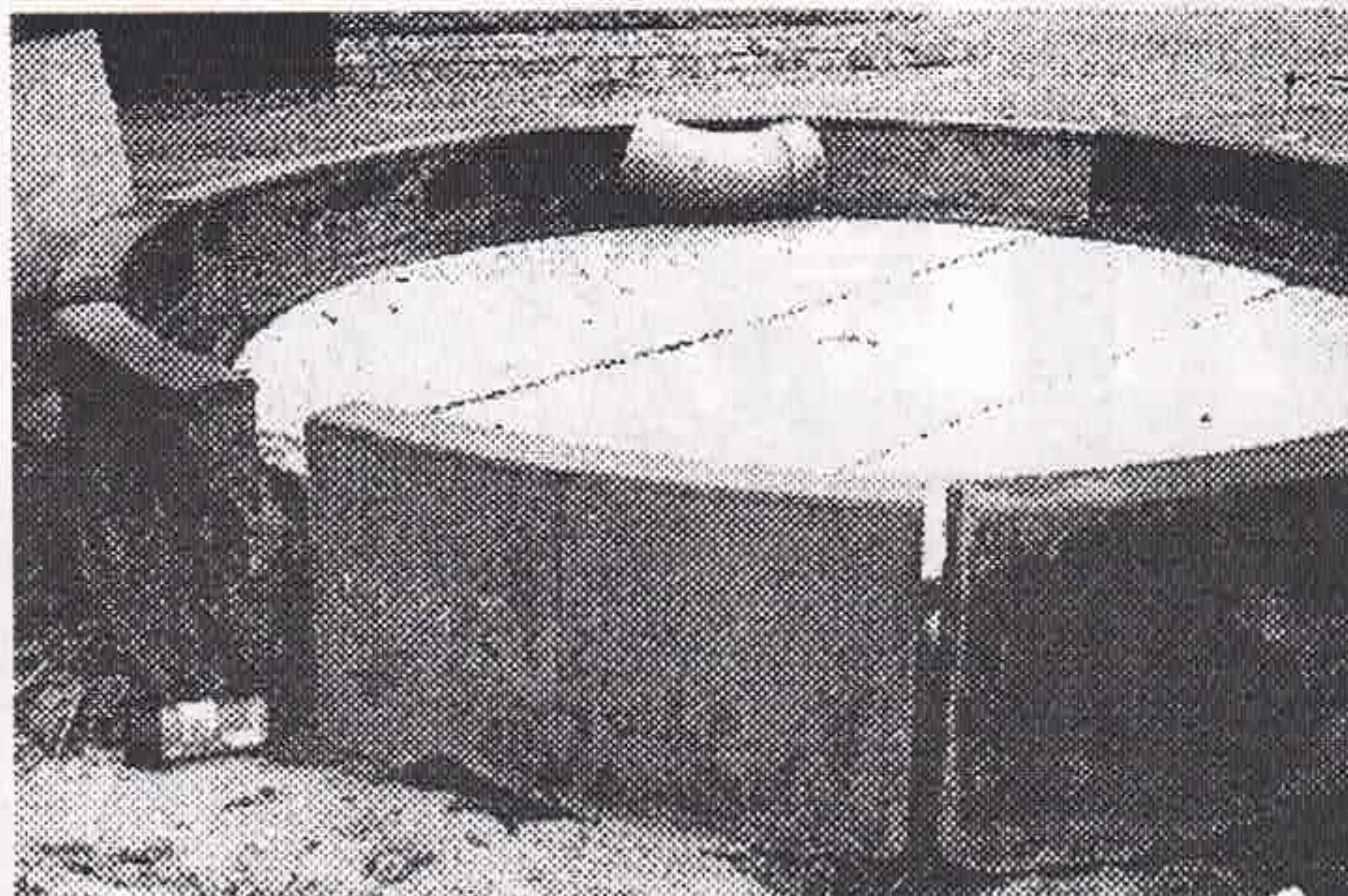
Below: Fine electro-bronzed cast iron Torchère. 1.5m high. Bfr 265,000 £5,300



Right: c1880 White marble Angel. 1.5m high. Bfr 150,000 £3,000

Below: 18thC Water Putti with migraine sitting on a Sea Monster. Limestone. Bfr 285,000 £5,700



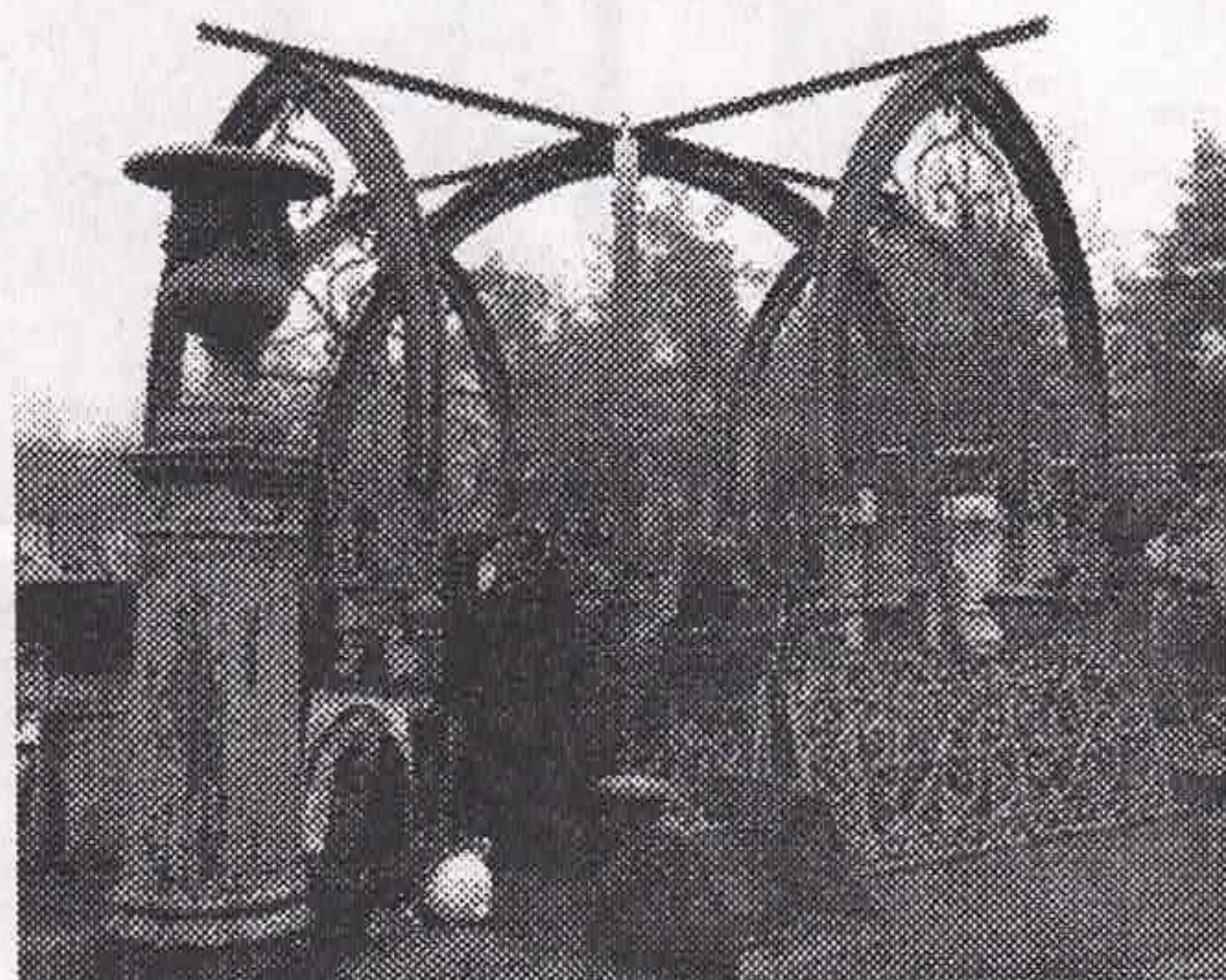
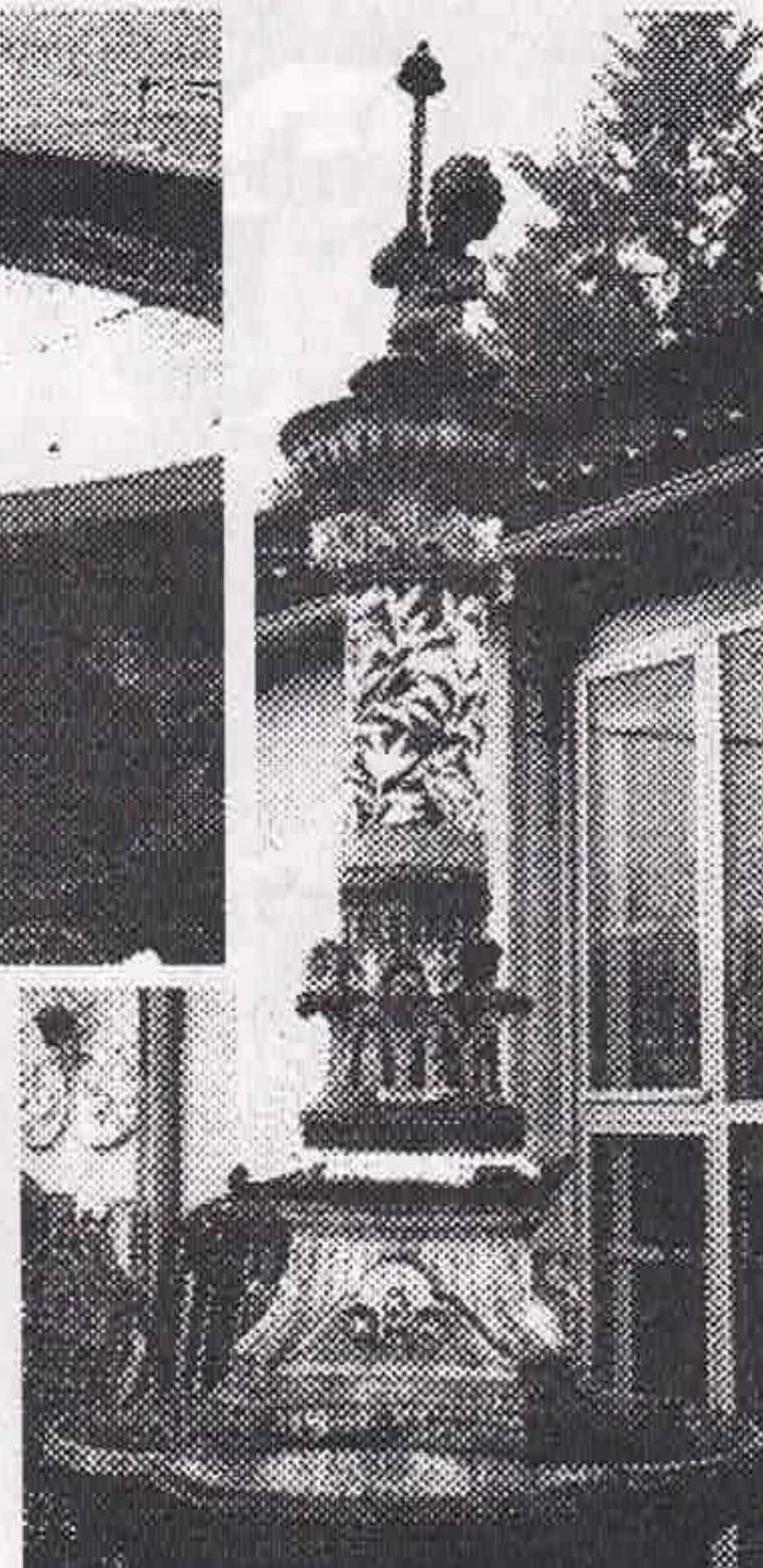


Above: Old Mill with pink tooled sandstone surround and white granite base. 4m dia. Bfr185,000 £3,700

Left: 3no Red terrazzo ashtray fountains.

1.7m dia. Bfr115,000 £2,300 ea

Right: Cast Iron French Fountain, rusting original blue and white paintwork. Over 2m tall. Bfr385,000 £7,700



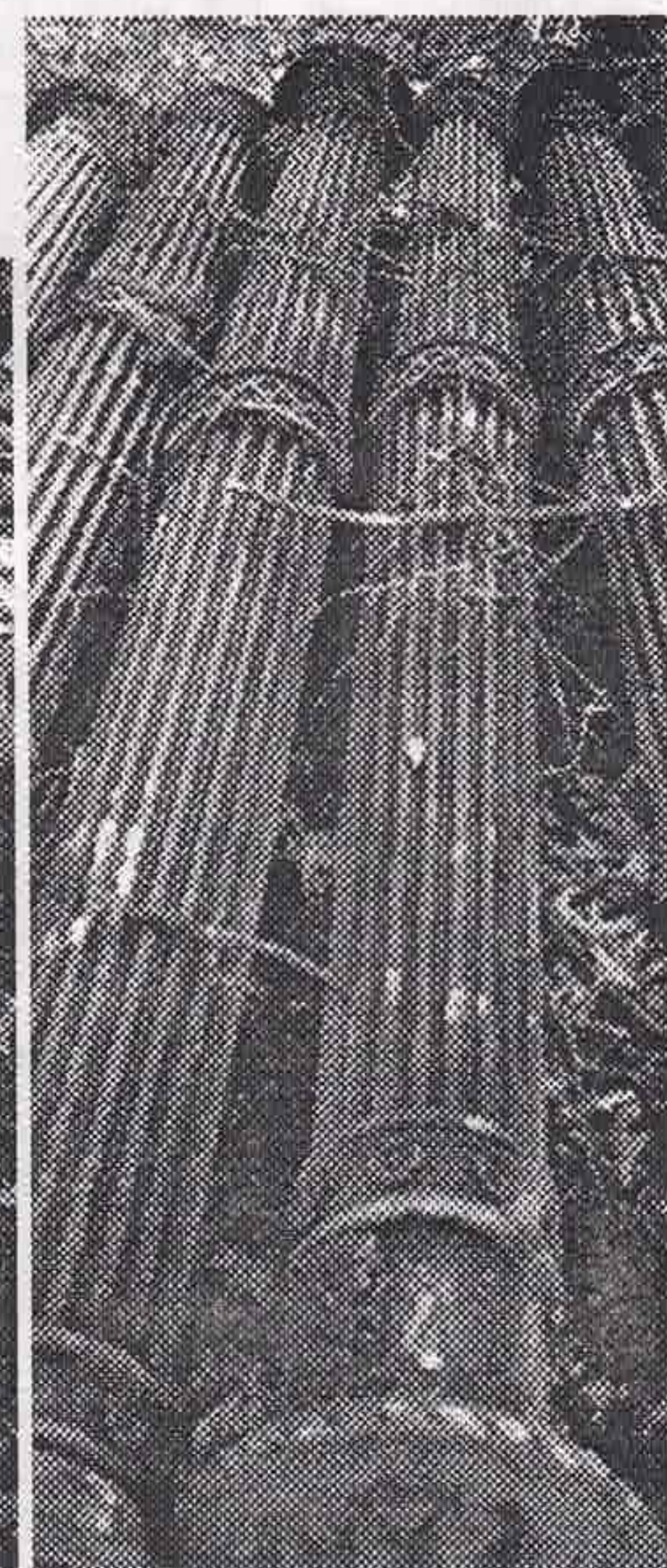
Above: Wrought and Cast Iron Conservatory cruciform plan with copper glazing bar glazed roof (not in place).

4m high. Erected price on application.

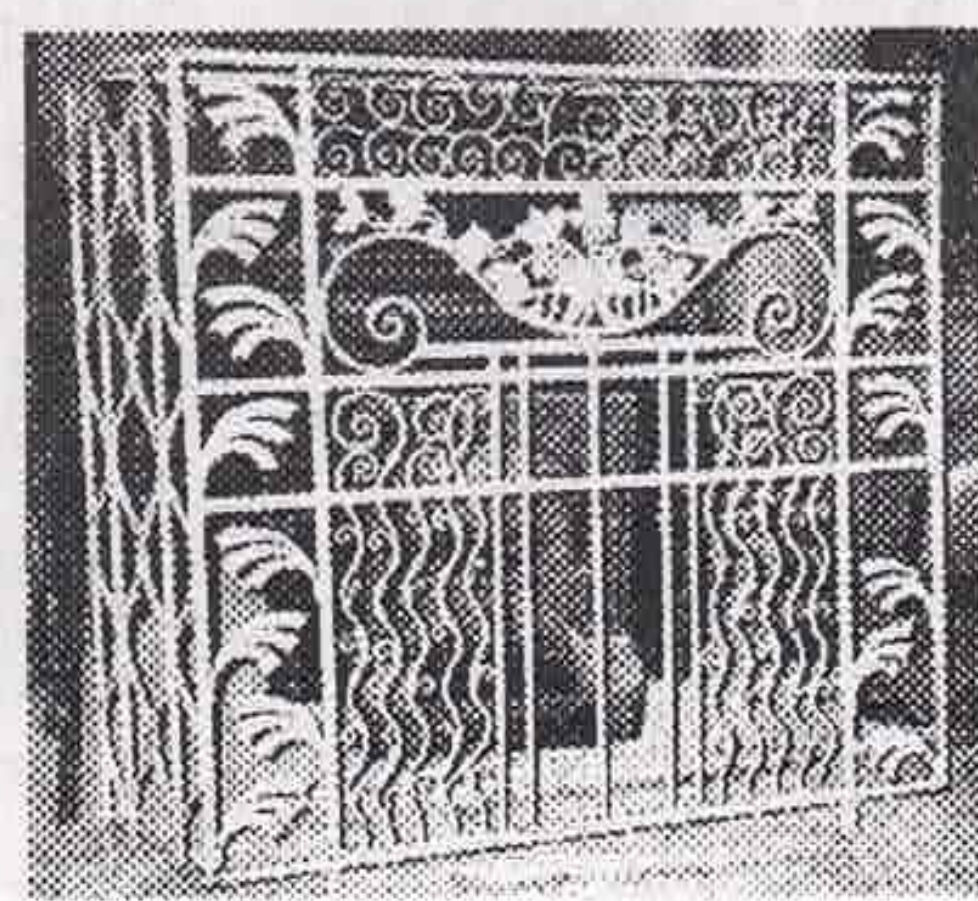
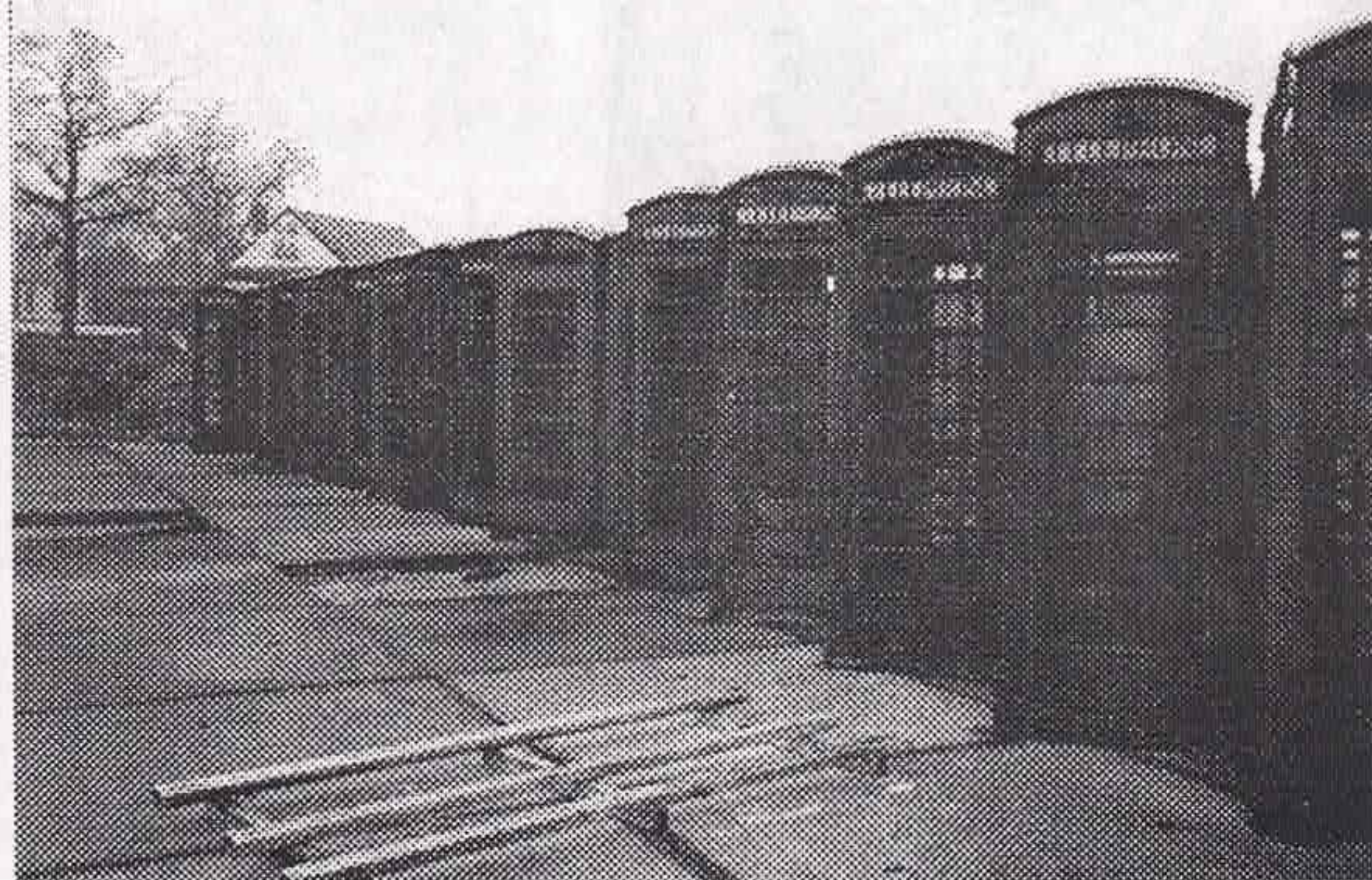
Below: A fleet of K6s, the 1936 'Jubilee' design by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott replaced the earlier K2. These ones are mostly post-1950. (See Gavin Stamp's excellent book Telephone Boxes for the full story, now remaindered but still on sale.)

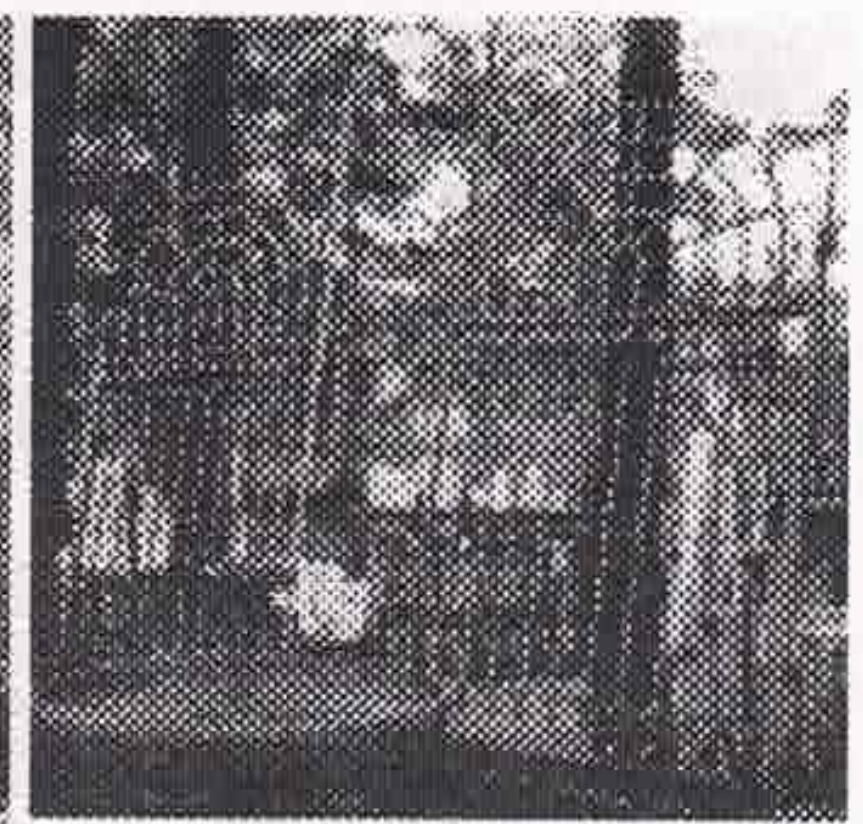
Unrestored Bfr35,000 £700. Restored 75,000 £1,500 each.

Right: 40 cast iron columns varying between 4.5m to 6m tall with caps and bases. Original dark green paintwork. Bfr95,000 £1,900 each. Probably late 19thC



Right: Enamelled light green and gold wrought iron Deco radiator screen. Bfr25,000 £500



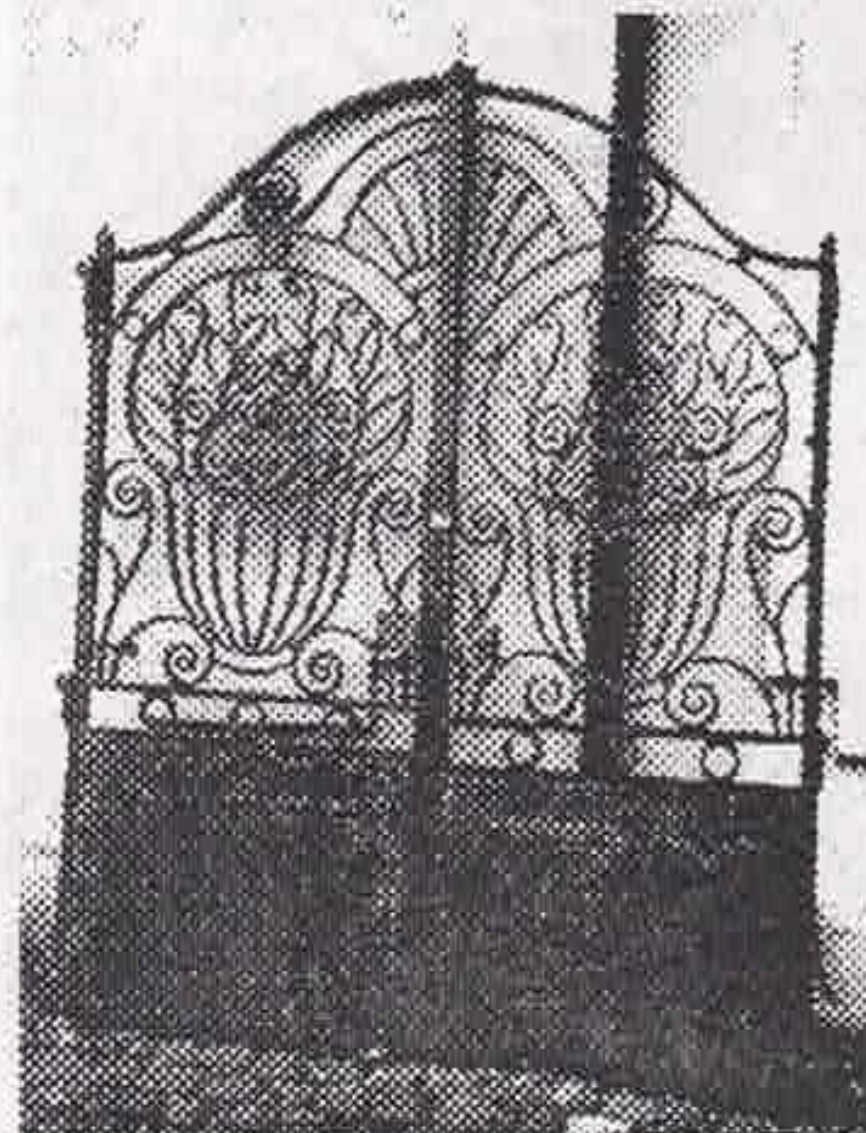


Above: Restored, blasted and primed
WI & CI Gates 4m wide by 4m high
Bfr245,000 £4,900



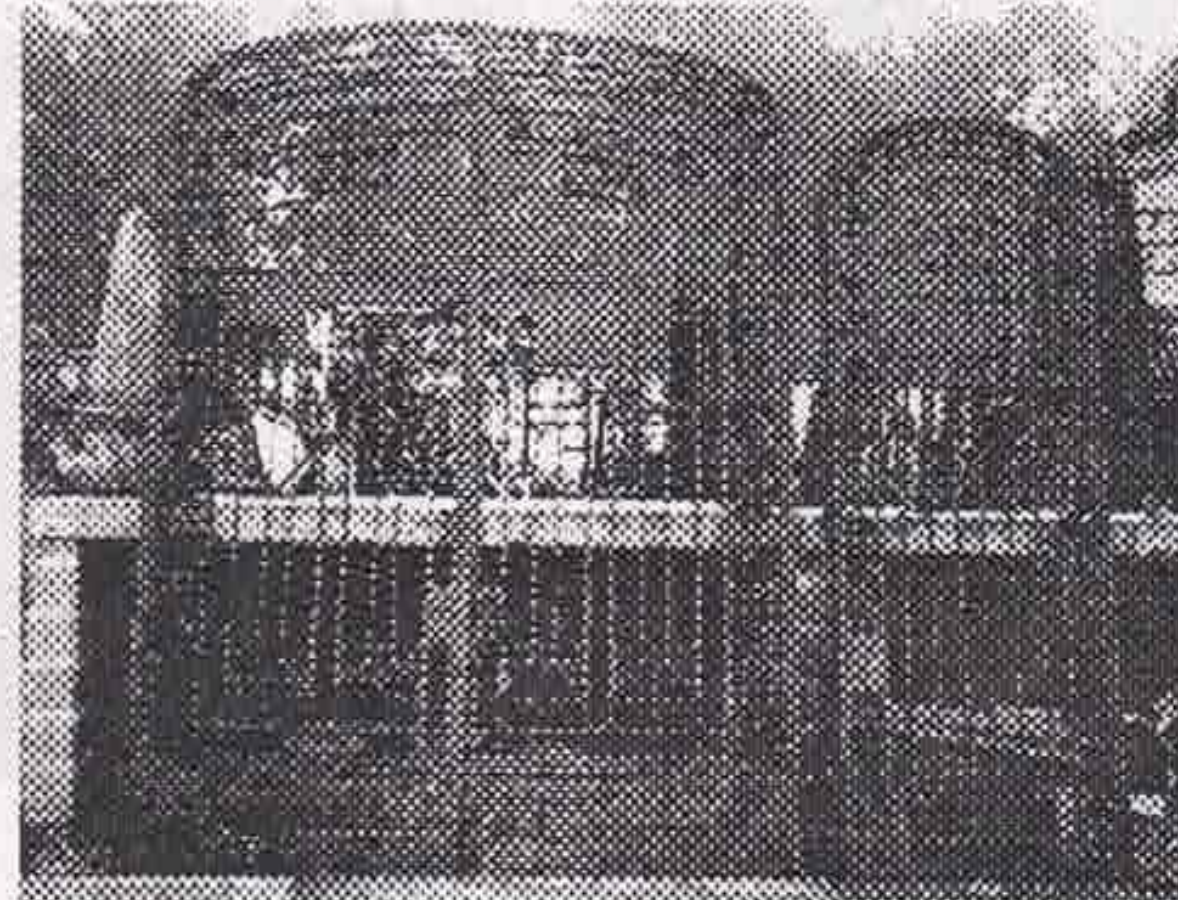
Above & Below: 5 pairs matching
Beaux Arts CI Gates & Overthrows.
Each 2.6m wide by 4.1m high.
Price Unknown

Above: 12no 7.2m tall WI Columns original technicolour paintwork c/w feather capitals (see front cover) by A. FRANSSEN c1898 ex Earthquake damaged whacky gothic church in Liège. Brilliant. Bfr125,000 £2,300 each. On the left are 14no Belgian Blue pedimented capping stones 1.6m long by 1.1m wide with deep green funeral patina. Totally macabre garden decorators items. Price Unknown.

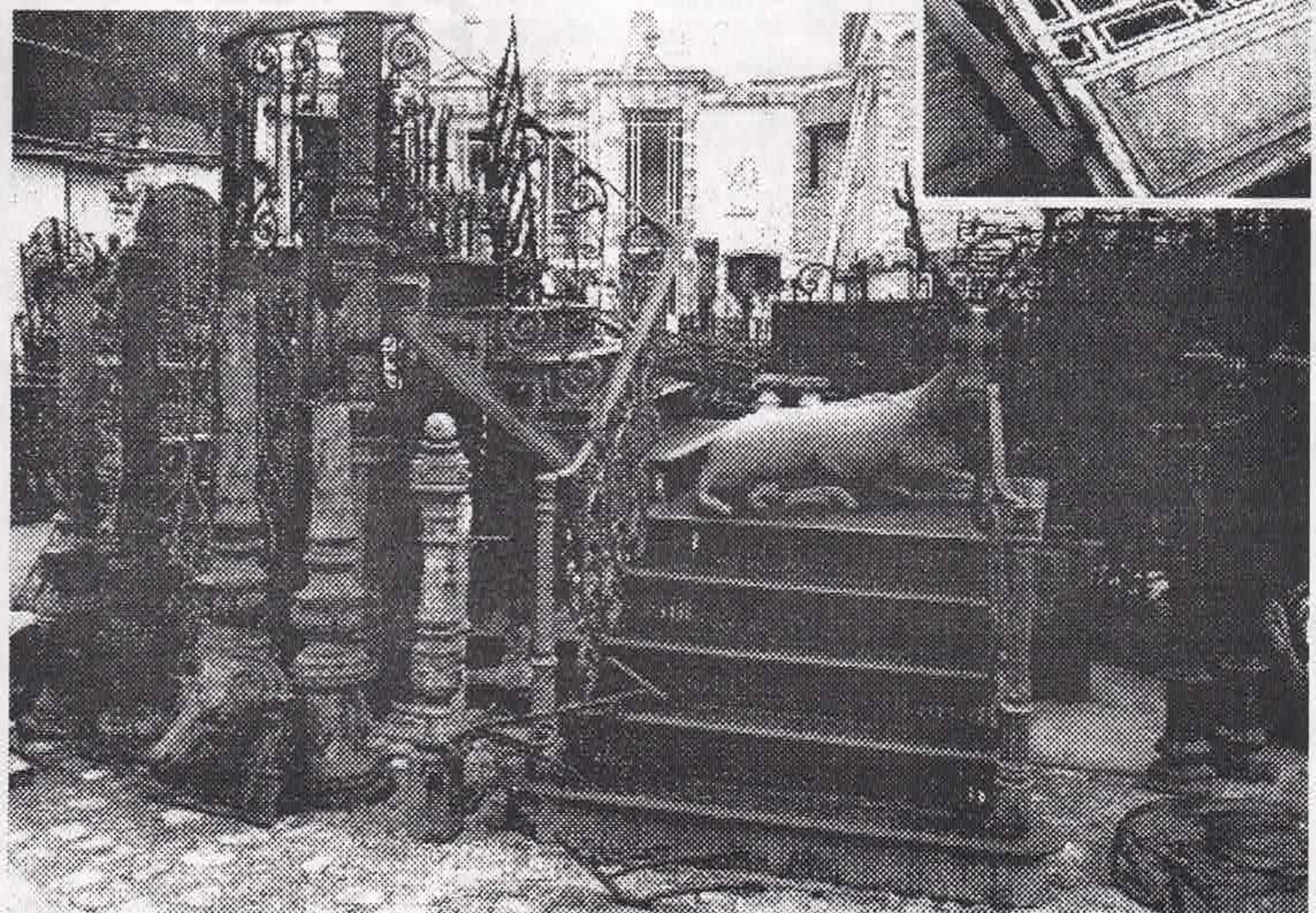
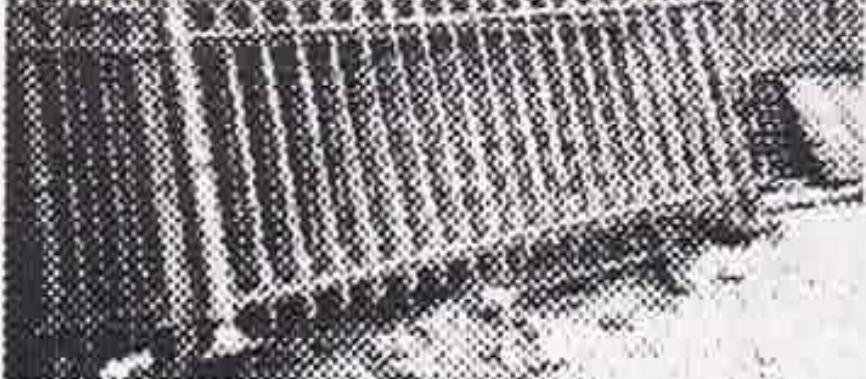
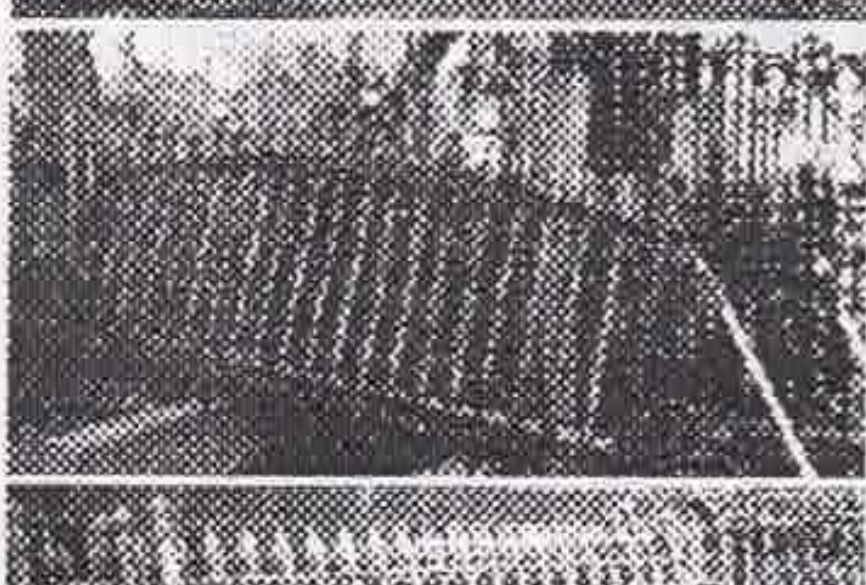
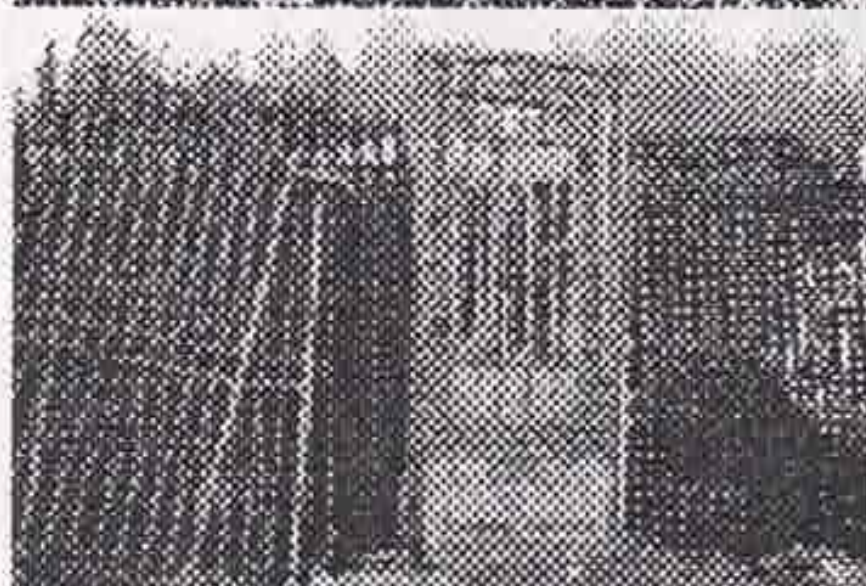
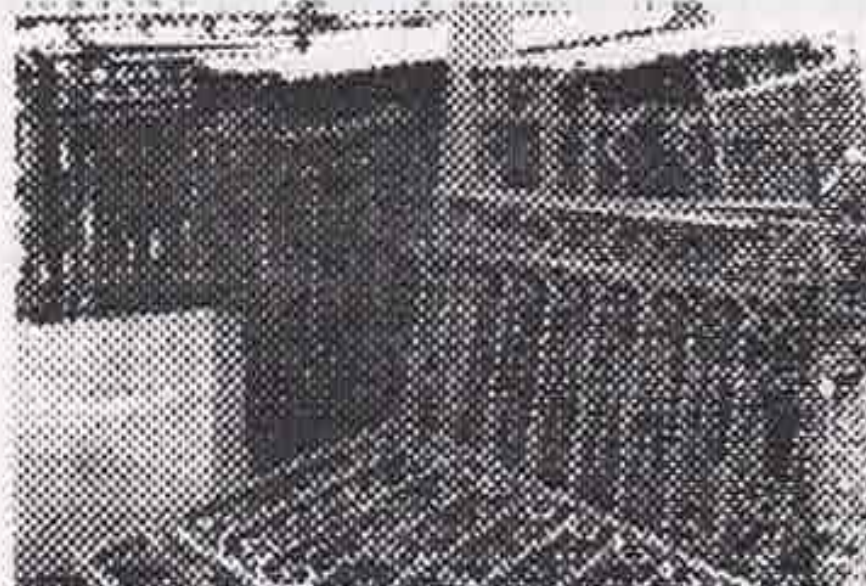


Left: Courtyard entrance gates.
WIron. 2mwide by 2.5m high.
Bfr360,000 £7,200

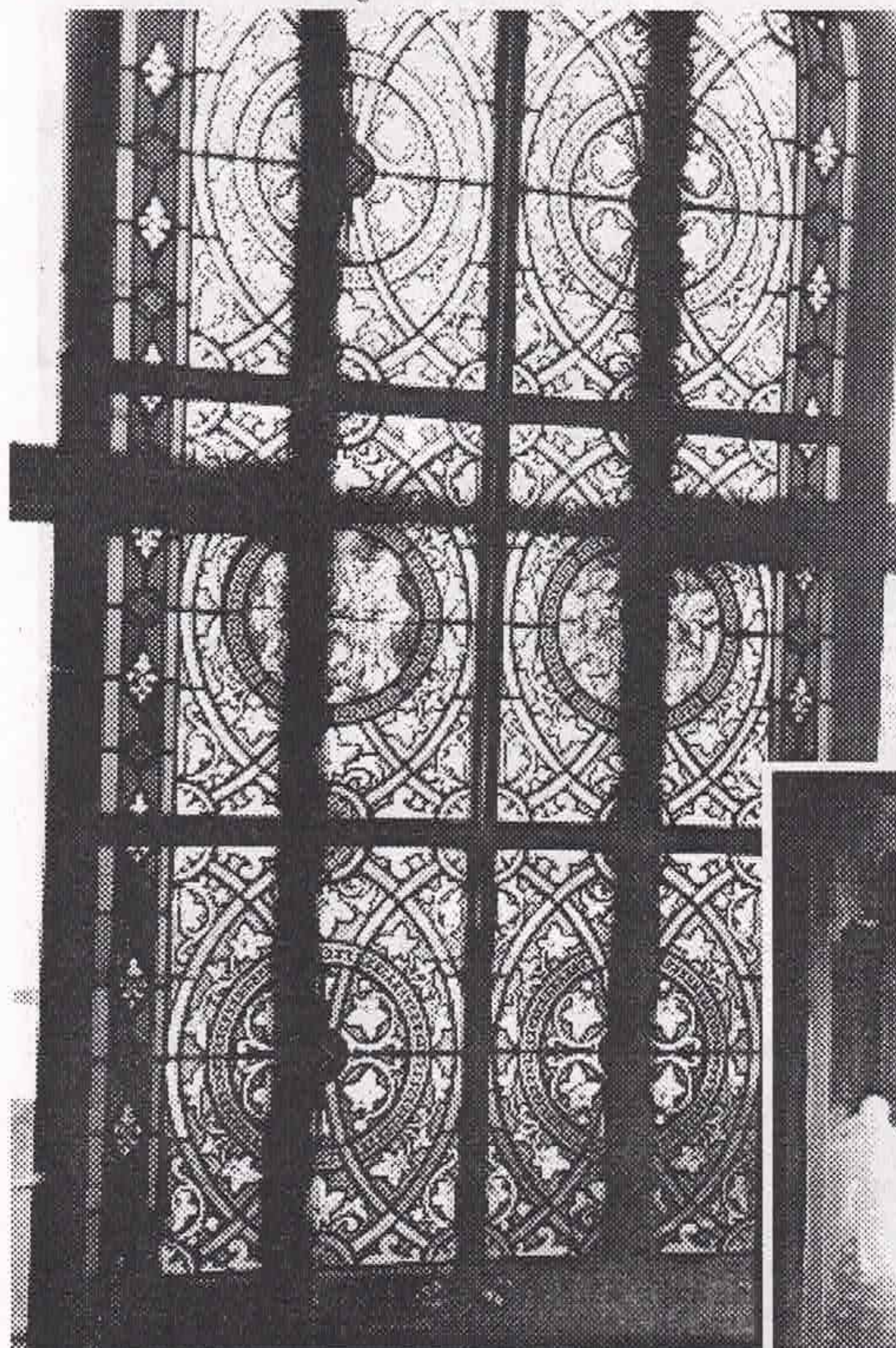
Right: Pretty WI Flowers on CI
Gates. Large Pair 2.8m wide by
3.6m high plus Smaller Single.
Price Unknown.



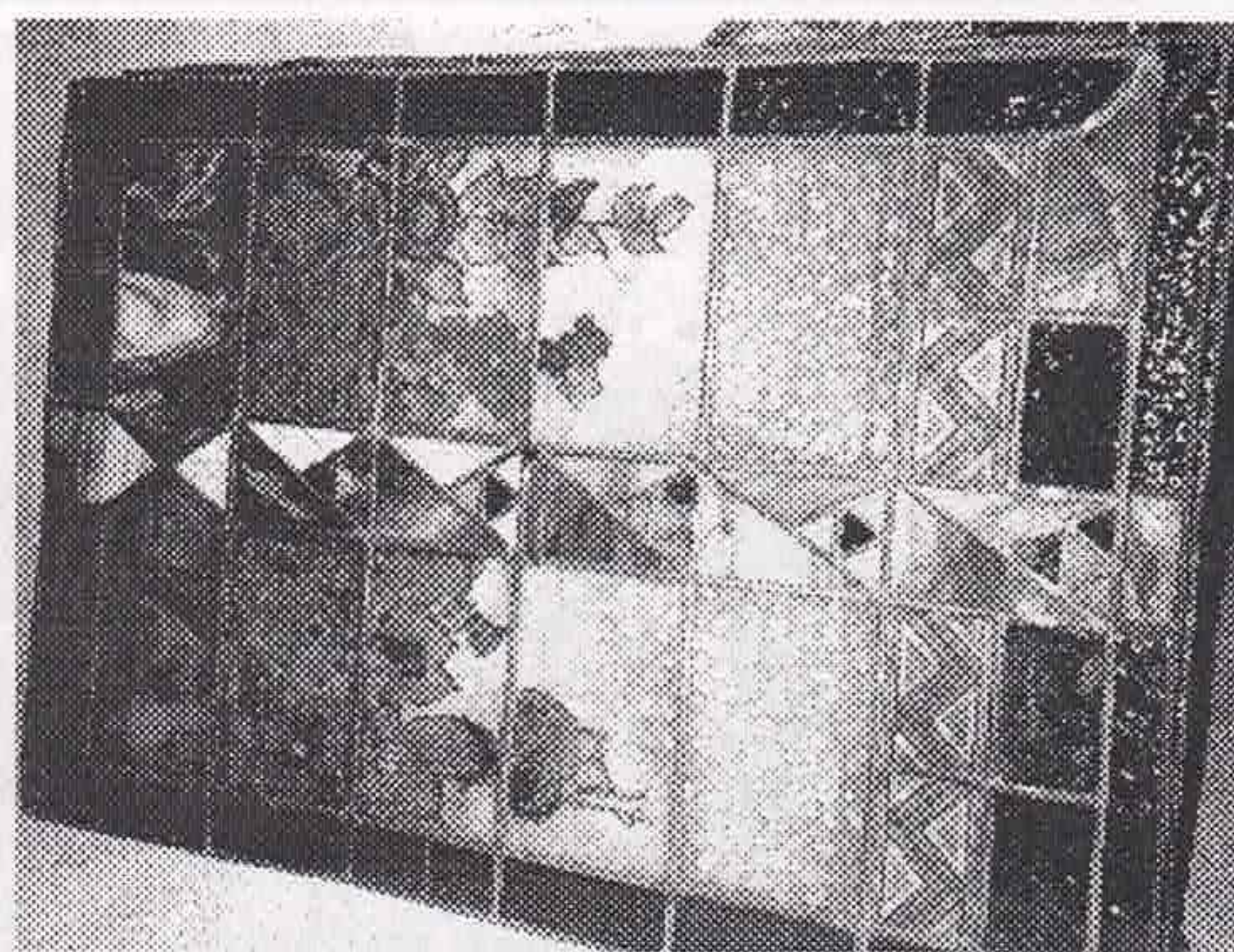
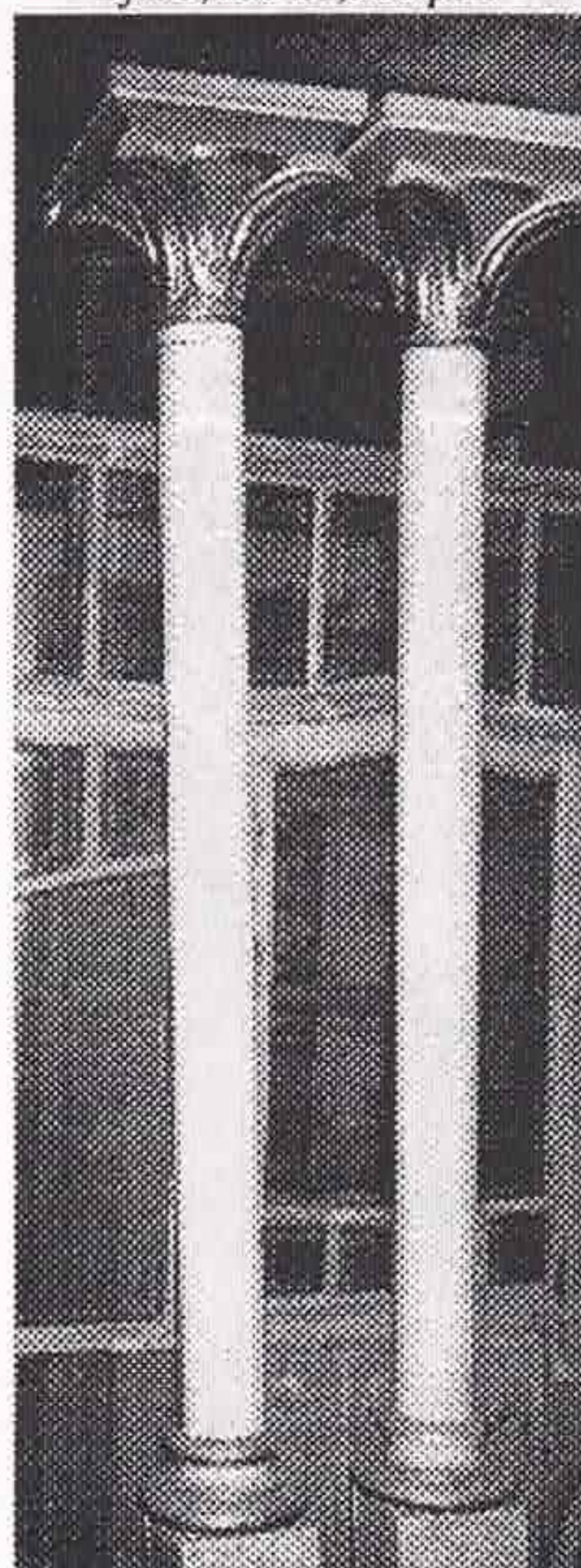
Below Left: Some general shots
of hundreds of metres of cast
and wrought iron railings.
Below: CI Stairs, Bollards,
Deer and Bulls Head.



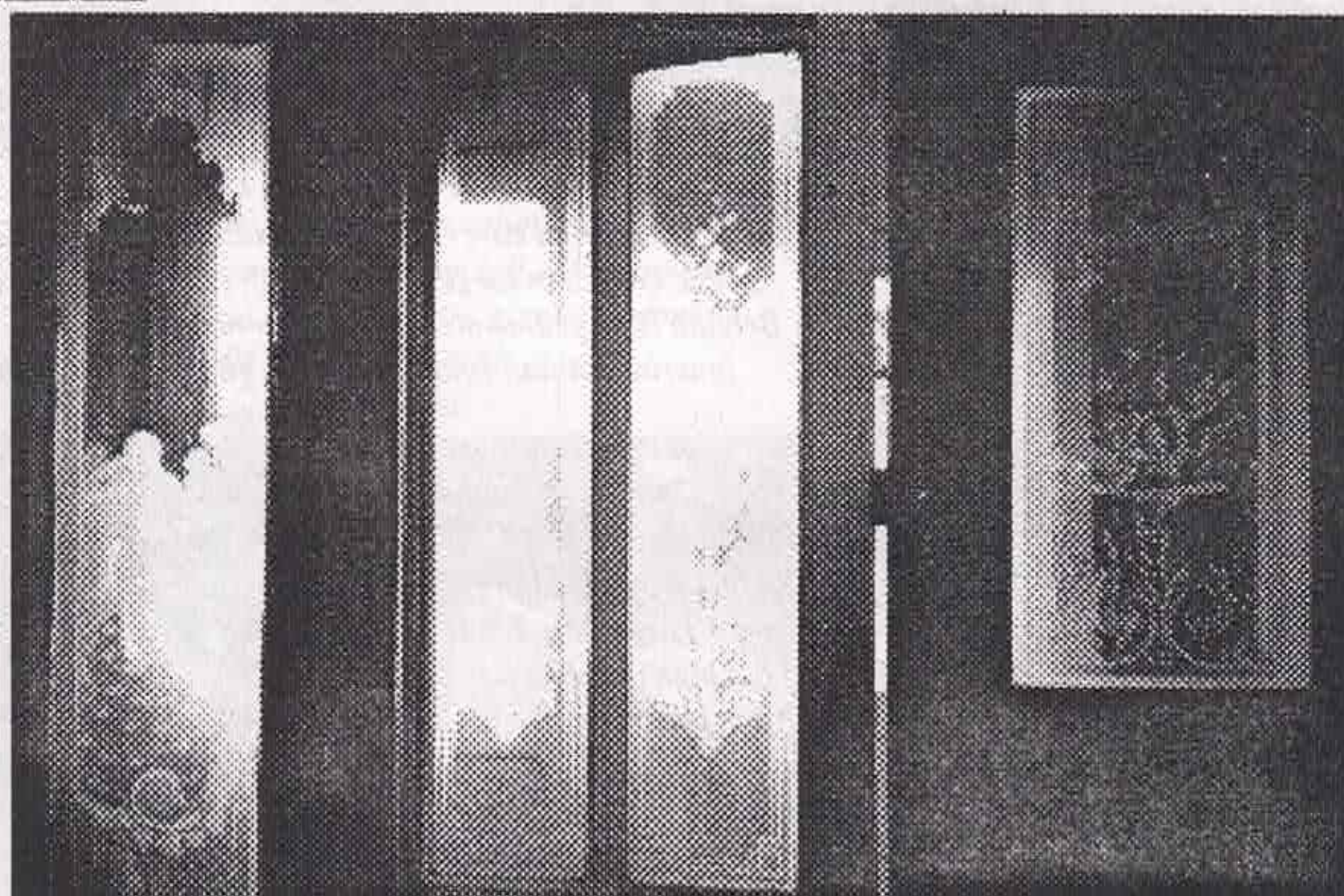
Below: Ecclesiastic stained glass. Price unknown.



Below: Open gilded lotus leaf caps pine columns. Original paint. 3 pairs. 3m high. Bfr95,000 £1,900 pair



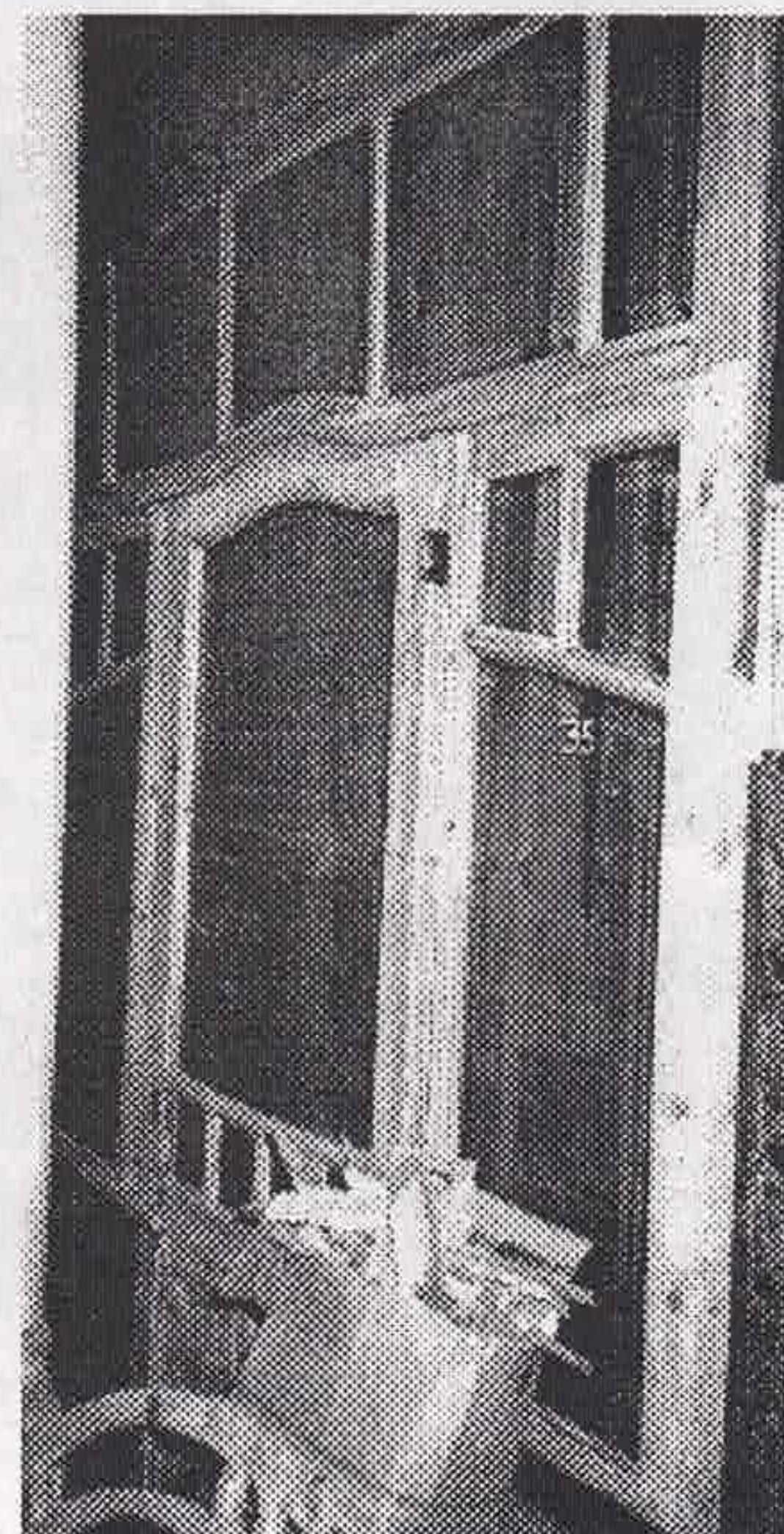
Above: Multi-media glass - stained, painted, obscure, vitriolite all forming a glazed ceiling canopy. 4 rectangular and 8 triangular panels. POA
Below: Selection of 40 acid and hand etched glazed panel doors Bfr12,000-16,000 £240-320 upwards.



Left: A number of prison cell doors with Belgian Blue jumbo ovolo architrave surround. Solid chestnut doors lined with iron on other side. Useful for people with kids. Bfr42,500 £850



Right: Polished plate chamfered glass screen with door. Bfr35,000 £700.



CARVED OAK BEAMS - no photo. 4m to 6m long, various sections. Naif, letters etc Bfr20,000 £400.

HUNDREDS of DOORS, panelled, ledge and braced, oak, chestnut, pine, walnut. Try offers for a job lot!

LOADSA PANELLING - walnut, oak, pine. Spandrels, flats, full height, dado.

FAX FOR DETAILS. Page 5

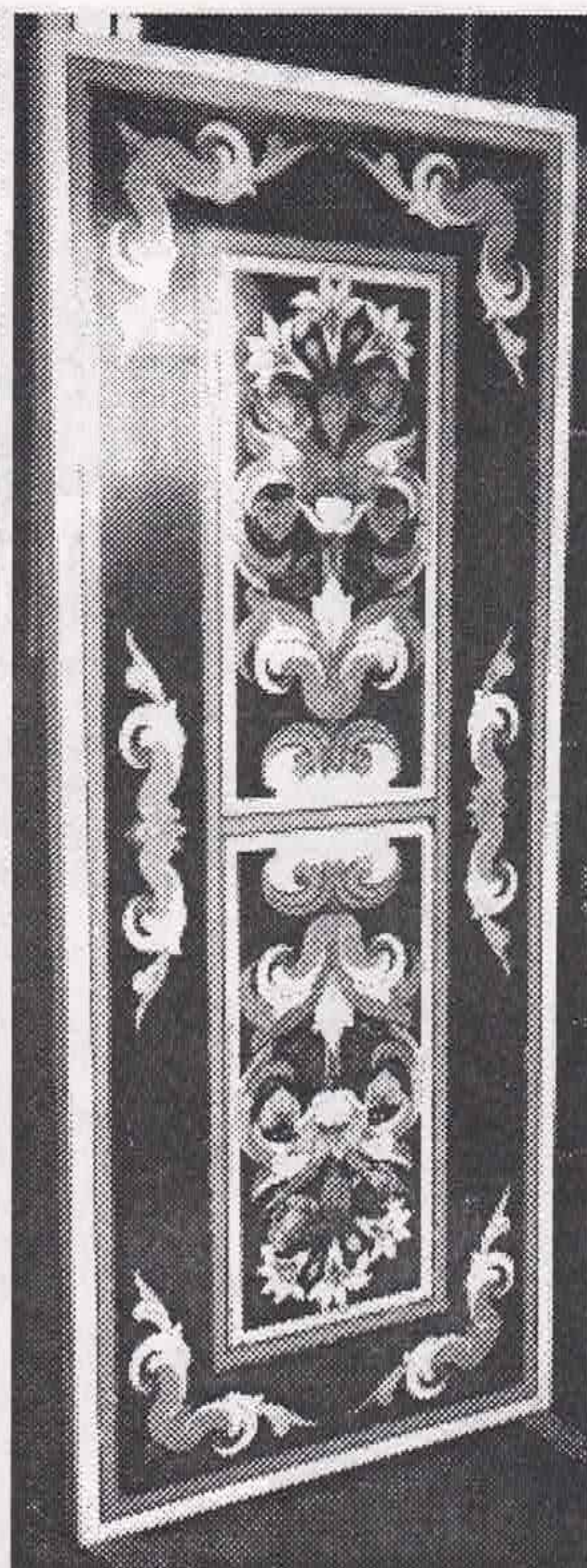


Left: Staircases galore. Oak and Walnut mostly with bannisters and handrail. Jacobean style etc.
Bfr150,000 to 300,000
£3,000 to £6,000 each



Right: Tiny helical oak winders and balustrade (ex pulpit?).
Bfr65,000 £1,300

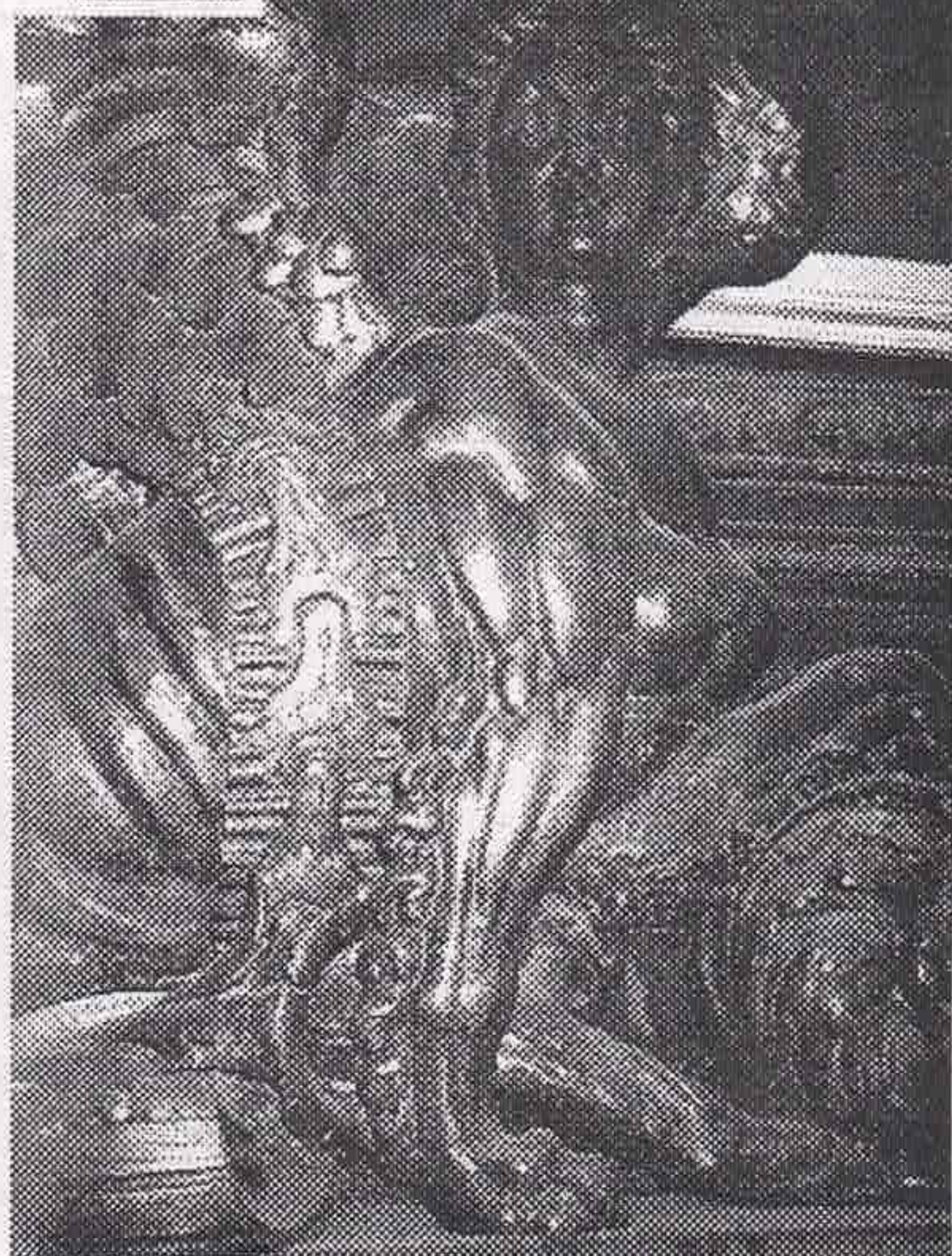
Below: Oak panelled room. Triple arched double doors to one side, plus chimneypiece and overmantle, solid panels opposite with doors.
Bfr2.5m £50,000

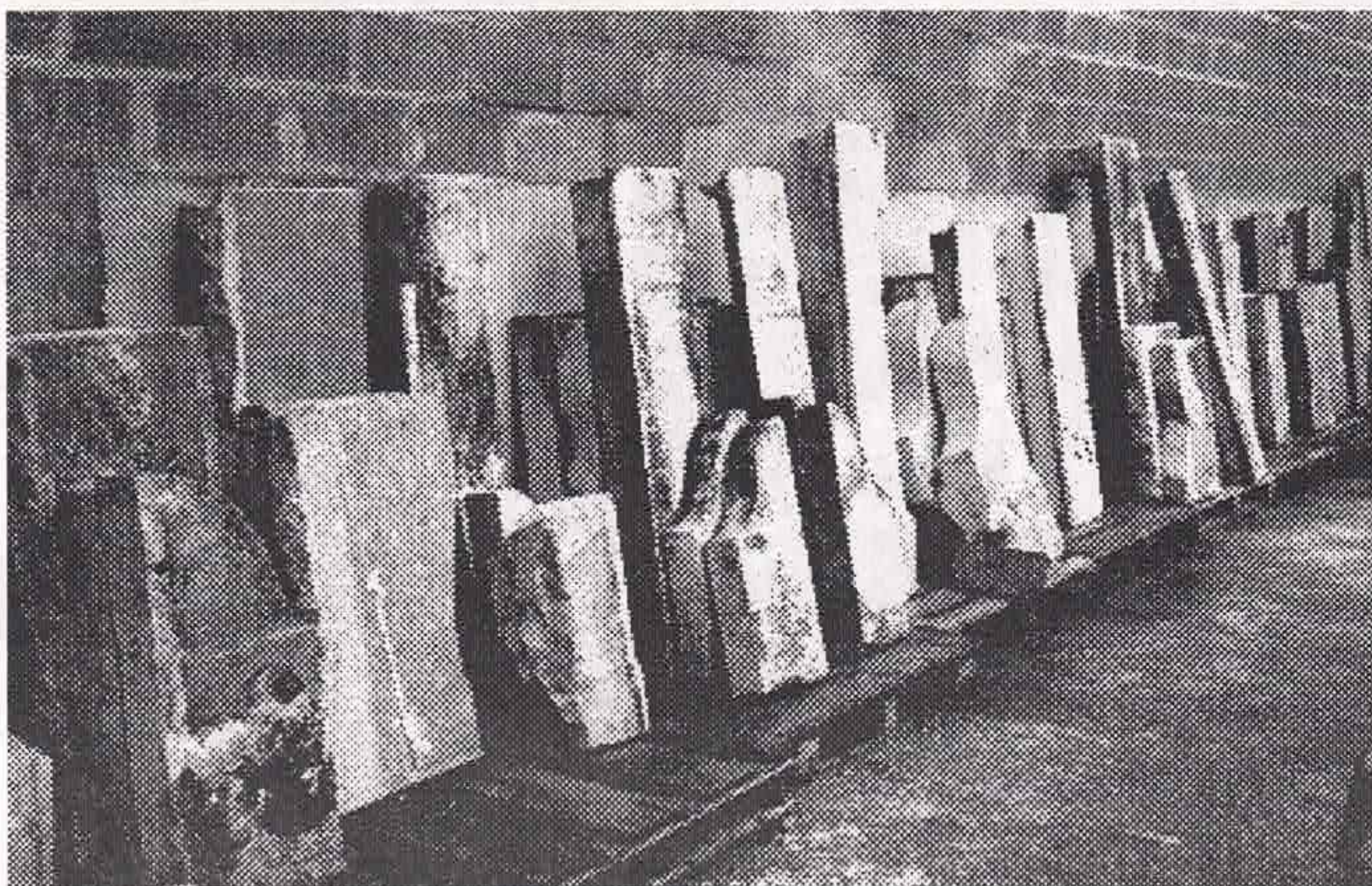


Above: Inlaid marble table top. Restored white edging. 1.95m by 82cm. 5cm thick.
Bfr1.2m £24,000

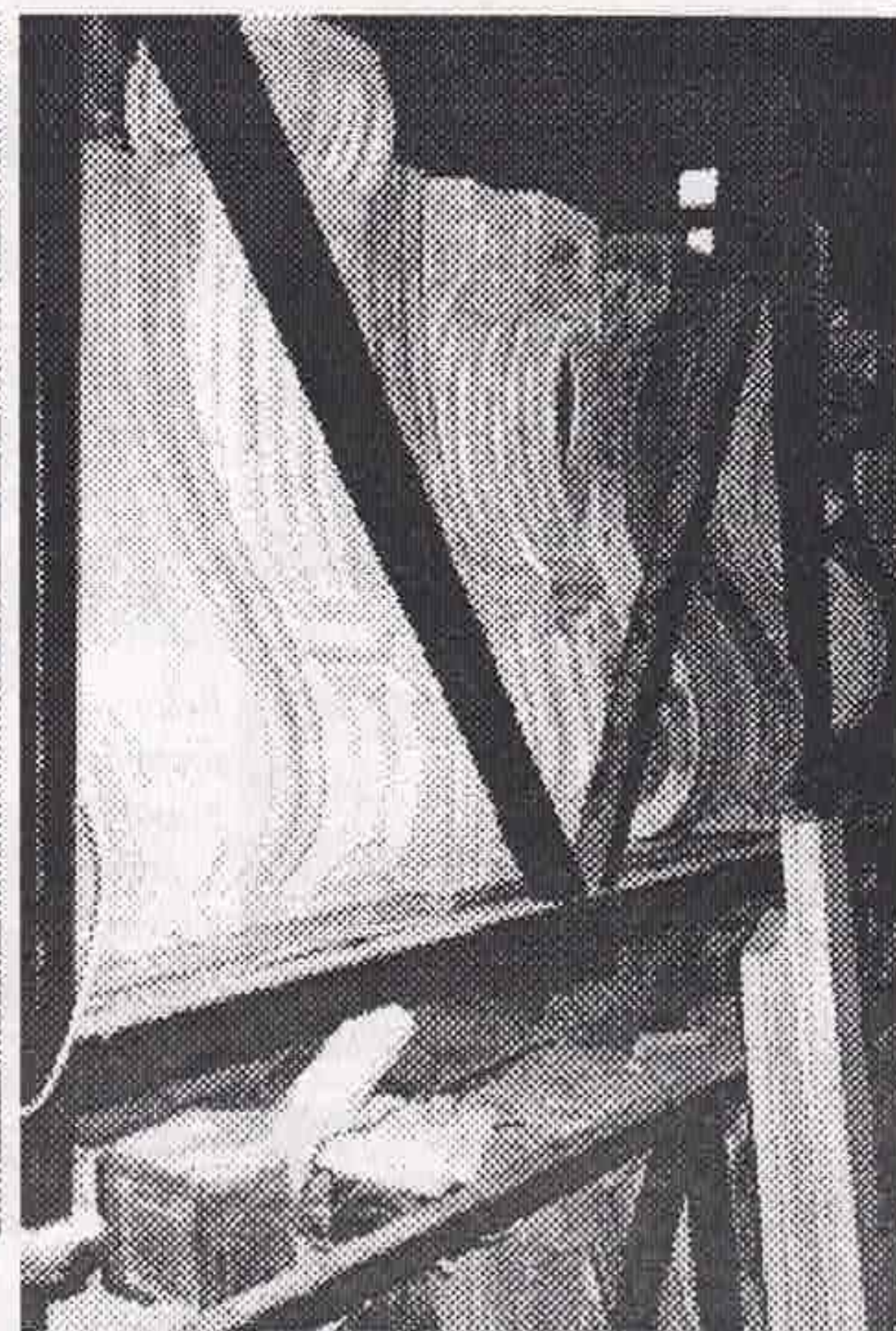


Right and Far Right: Highly carved huge oak Jacht tafel (after hunting game table) with muscular sphinx.
3m wide by 2.4m high
Bfr850,000 £17,000

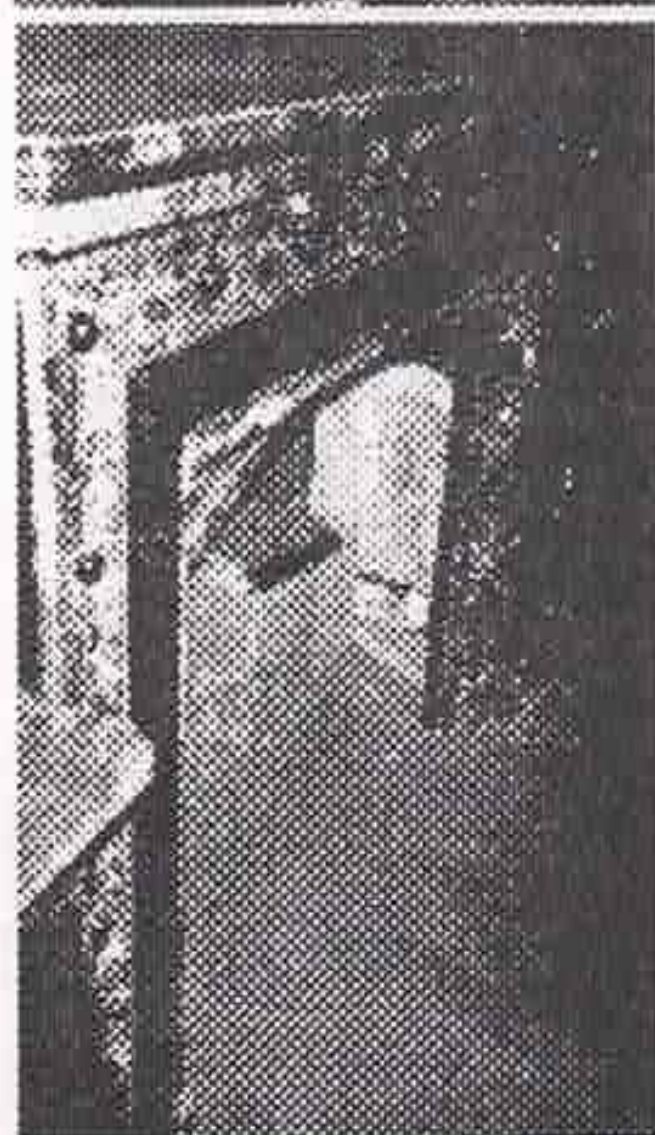




Above: A number of rustic corbel and mantle fire surrounds in marble, limestone and granite. From Bfr100,000 £2,000 Cleaned and restored



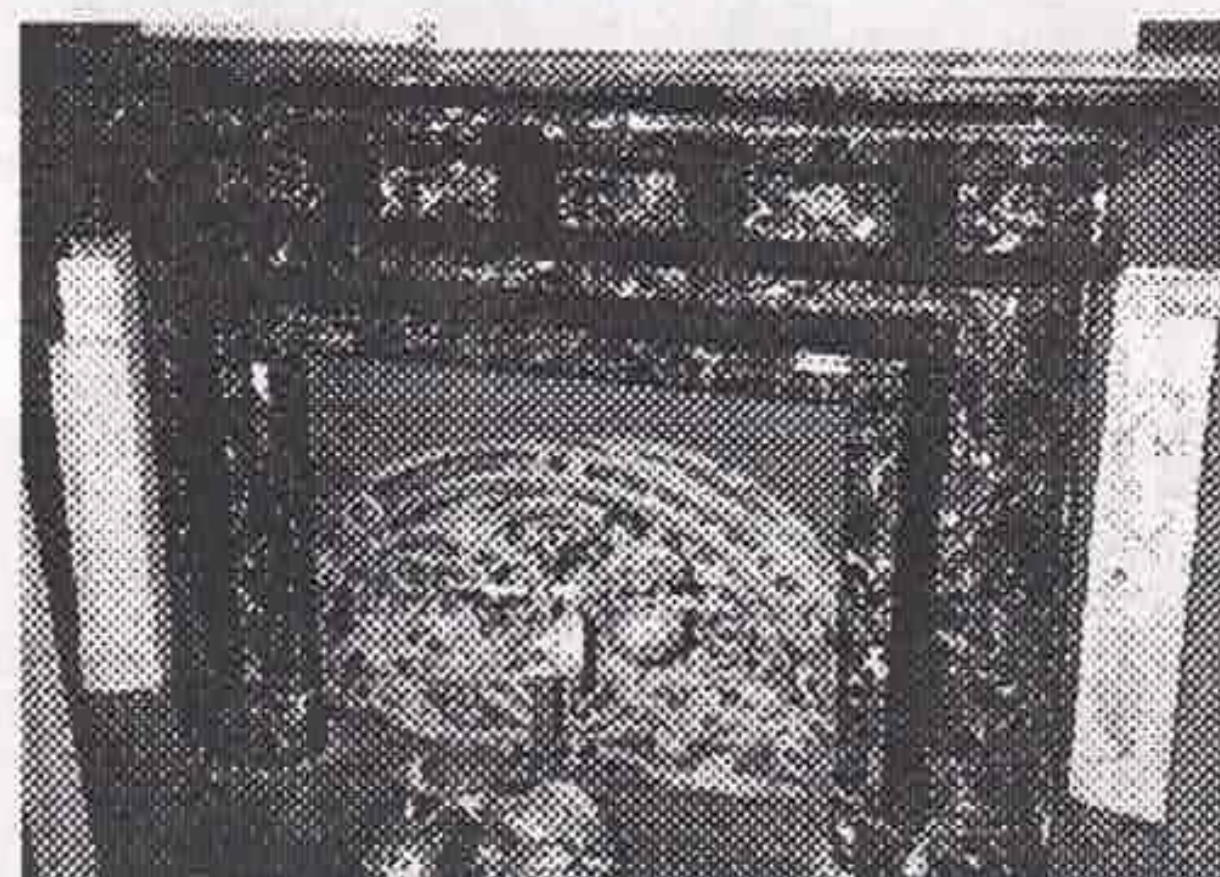
Right Above: Different marble corbels. POA



Left: Arched marble late 19thC chimneypiece with black knobs. 2.2m wide by 1.4m high.

Below Left: Large demi-lune Black Marble. 2.2m wide by 1.5m high. Bfr185,000 £3,700.

Bottom Left: Small demi-lune marble. 1.5m wide by 1.3m high. Bfr 175,000 £3,500 also
Godin Stove Bfr16,000 £320



Right: Carved oak overmantle with mirror and nuptial shield belonging to right hand chimneypiece in photo below.

Below: Right hand chimneypiece is 18thC Fine Oak with overmantle in photo above. 1.9m wide by 3.5m high overall. Bfr425,000 £8,500.
Left hand Carved Oak with corbel heads 1.65m wide by 1.45m high. Bfr215,000 £4,300

MANY OTHER FINE ITEMS OF STATUARY, CHIMNEYPIECES ETC and a coffee bar and restaurant. Details page 5 and see "An Interview Without Marcel Raymaekers" in SN50.

